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Alasdair MacIntyre's Communitarian Vision:
A Meaningful Moral Alternative for Modernity?

by

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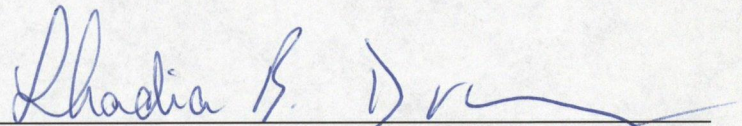
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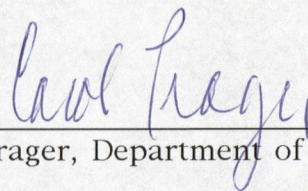
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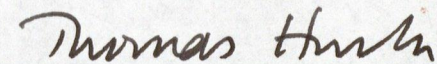
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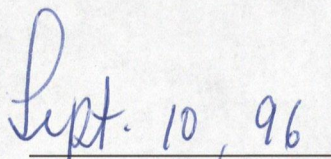
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Abstract

In recent years, dissatisfaction with life in the modern age has led to a yearning by many for a kind of life they see as having been embodied in communities that only existed in the past. Because many of those expressing this sort of desire equate modernity with liberalism, that philosophy has become their target, and its elimination has become their first goal on the road to a resurrection of the values of the *anciens regimes* that are their ideal. Among the most prominent of the antiliberals is a group of philosophers who have come to be known as communitarians. Those to whom the title applies argue that only by embracing a community of values with a shared moral horizon can we make our moral decisions meaningful and thereby escape the “malaise of modernity”. Early communitarian philosophers include Michael Sandel, Michael Walzer, Charles Taylor, and Alasdair MacIntyre. Of these, it is MacIntyre -- through his idea of great traditions as being the source of moral order and wisdom for their communities -- who offers the most fully articulated communitarian alternative to liberalism and modernity. This thesis takes as its central theme the question of whether MacIntyre’s communitarian vision is capable of providing a compelling and meaningful alternative for modernity.

Chapter one provides an overview of the liberal-communitarian debate and describes the basic philosophies of major communitarian thinkers. Liberals complain that communitarian alternatives to liberal society are unspecific, while communitarians argue that their philosophy cannot fairly be assessed from an external (*i. e.*, liberal) perspective. Given these views, a more philosophically neutral assessment of the most well-elaborated of the communitarian philosophies -- that of Alasdair MacIntyre -- is argued to be the most useful analytical tack to take in trying to come to a deeper understanding of communitarianism.

Chapter two is an examination of the tension between two of the core notions of MacIntyre's philosophy. Like all communitarians, MacIntyre argues that there is no universal source of truth or moral wisdom. Yet at the same time, he argues for the moral authority of the great traditions in their local contexts and advocates our construction of similar tradition-driven local communities in the present day. What then is the source of the authority MacIntyre attributes to such traditions? A number of possibilities are considered, with the ultimate conclusion being that power provides the central justification for the authority MacIntyre finds in the traditions he advocates.

Chapter three is a consideration of whether MacIntyre can coherently advocate power-derived, tradition-based communities while staying true to the other values to which he gives his philosophical allegiance. I argue that the power-based nature of the traditional societies that MacIntyre lauds is incompatible with his advocacy of rationality, his repudiation of emotivism, and his rejection of Nietzscheanism.

Chapter four returns to the original question of whether or not MacIntyre's communitarian vision succeeds at its own goal of providing an alternative moral foundation for modernity. I argue that it does not. The very problems communitarians see in modernity -- baseless morality, self-serving moral argumentation, and devaluation of the notion of moral truth -- are all present in the tradition-based conception of truth inherent in Alasdair MacIntyre's communitarian vision.

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Chapter One: The Liberal-Communitarian Debate

Communitarianism is a philosophy that simultaneously harkens back to the past and looks to the future. Its advocates urge us to look backward to a time when people lived in communities whose members shared common moral horizons for guidance as to how we might reconstruct our communities and live our lives in the future. In our modern societies of the present day, communitarians argue, we have lost our ability to interrelate on anything but the most utilitarian terms, to imagine shared goals, or, most importantly, to conceive of a common and meaningful system of moral values. Communitarians' fears for our foundationless modern culture might aptly be emblemized by these lines from William Butler Yeats' "Second Coming":

Turning and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold. . .
(Yeats, 1990 [1920])

In communitarians' eyes, it is liberalism which underlies this "malaise of modernity".¹ That philosophy's conception of people as isolated, individualistic, and self-interested has led us to a point at which we can no longer imagine ourselves as a real community. It is only by turning our back on the valuelessness of modernity and reembracing the notion of shared conceptions of the good that typified the communities of our past that we can again attain a meaningful moral life.

Of course, nostalgia for the better days of the past is a recurrent phenomenon; some might suggest that it is even a fundamental characteristic of human nature. We might therefore question how much attention those engaging in it should be paid: perhaps the past always will seem better than the present to such minds. But what makes the communitarian attack on liberalism a subject worthy of attention is the increasing extent to which it

has come to define political discourse. The communitarian vision is growing in influence, and liberalism seems increasingly vulnerable to its attack. If our western societies are indeed moving in a communitarian direction, then it would be wise to devote some attention to understanding the alternative that philosophy is offering.

Among the early communitarians -- Michael Sandel, Michael Walzer, Charles Taylor, and Alasdair MacIntyre -- I would argue that the most well-articulated communitarian vision is MacIntyre's. He asserts that the great traditions of history which informed the lives of earlier moral communities (such as Aristotelian Athens or mediaeval Christendom, for example) offer us a road back to the moral certainty and direction of the past. By constructing our own "local communities" based on one of the great traditions, we can transcend the valuelessness of our present day. Such traditions are crucial to our well-being: they define the life, the culture, the very essence of the community in which they hold sway. If the liberalism of our modern culture has destroyed traditions, MacIntyre would argue, then ultimately it has destroyed the basis of our social life. This thesis takes as its central theme the question of whether MacIntyre's communitarian vision succeeds at its own goal of providing a meaningful alternative for modernity.

Before we can address this issue directly, however, it is first necessary to set out more fully the details of the liberal-communitarian debate which provide the backdrop to MacIntyre's philosophy. We might begin by considering the role of political philosophies like liberalism and communitarianism. Once its more obvious necessities have been met, the basic problems of human life become questions of morality. How can we live our lives in a moral way? How should we relate to others around us? How should our society be structured? These questions ultimately lead back to an even more central set of questions. What is the source of our ethics? What

constitutes an authoritative moral requirement? And why do we find such requirements compelling?

In modern times, the most influential answers to questions such as these have been provided by liberalism.² Liberals believe that reason is the first source of morality, that answers to moral questions can be arrived at through rational thought and critical deliberation. Since both a concern for ethics and a capacity for reason are distinctly human characteristics, it is no surprise that liberals link the two. Our distinctly human concern for ethics derives from our distinctly human ability to act rationally rather than instinctually. Reason, then, is our best source of ethical wisdom. And since reason is a *human* quality, ethical principles based on it will apply to all humans; that is, universally.

But the reach of reason is capable of extending only so far. Not all problems of human life and morality are capable of rational resolution. Liberal thought therefore recognizes a second source of morality in these arenas. This second source lies at the level of individual human beings, and concerns issues for which reason is not capable of determining answers. In areas such as this, individuals are expected to make their own moral determinations based on their own criteria.

From this recognition of the existence of two levels of morality comes the liberal notion of differentiation between the *right* and the *good*. The right is that which can be reached by reason: its dictates are universal and non-optional. The good is that which cannot be reached by reason: it is determined by individual processes of decision-making and it is its existence which mandates the liberal guarantees of individuality and freedom of choice which are the hallmarks of that philosophy. In practice, the right is limited to rules for determining how we are to live together and interact when we cannot rationally arrive at or agree upon the good. Liberal philosophical systems,

then, are premised both on the idea that there will be (often significant) disagreements about the good and that those in disagreement must nonetheless find a way to live together.

Of course, liberals differ in how extensive they see each aspect of ethical life as being. Modern liberalism's notions of the realm of the rational range from the expansive social welfare liberalism of John Rawls,³ in which a great deal of life is seen as being capable of falling within the "right", to the limited, libertarian liberalism of Robert Nozick,⁴ in which the "right" is seen as encompassing only the "nightwatchman" requirements of human cohabitation. Liberal understandings of the role that individual freedom plays in their philosophy are also varied. Bruce Ackerman, for example, notes that at least four different liberal rationales have been suggested for such freedoms: realism about the corrosiveness of power (suggesting the need for an individual realm as a limitation on how far the authority of the powerful can extend); recognition of doubt as a necessary step to moral knowledge; respect for the autonomy of persons; and skepticism concerning the reality of transcendent meaning (Ackerman, 1980, p. 369).⁵

Despite these ranges of opinion, modern liberals agree at the very least upon a moral scheme in which authority is located at two different levels: the universality of reason, and the individuality of choice. At the higher level, rationality dictates certain universal ethical standards: equality (at the very least in the political realm), freedom of speech and thought, liberty. At the lower level, individual freedoms allow individuals to engage in their own idiosyncratic moral cogitation in regard to issues which universal reason cannot encompass: religion, perfectionist goals, life choices. The modern liberal model is an appealing one to many, finding as it does the authority for its moral requirements in *reason*, and ensuring as it does a high level of

autonomy and freedom in areas of life where reason cannot reach.

Since the Age of Enlightenment, liberal conceptions of ethics and politics have become established, entrenched, and ultimately dominant in and definitive of “modern” politico-philosophical discourse. Liberal notions of individuality, autonomy, morality, economics, the social structure, and even human relationships have become so pervasive that many -- in western societies at least -- can imagine their world in no other way. In recent years, however, new challenges to liberal orthodoxy have arisen. Amongst such challenges is that issued by the communitarians, who have begun to put into question liberalism’s and modernism’s basic tenets, to question the Enlightenment itself. Where liberals understand politics as being limited in scope by the very limitations of reason, communitarians understand politics more in the Aristotelian sense, as an inculcator of the virtues, as the source of meaning in human life.

Like liberalism, communitarianism incorporates a number of different strains. Early communitarians⁶ Michael Sandel, Michael Walzer, Charles Taylor, and Alasdair MacIntyre have each devoted a book or books to the development of their own diverse versions of this philosophy. The Robert Bellah group’s (Bellah, Richard Madsen, William Sullivan, Ann Swidler, Steven Tipton) vastly popular *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* took a less philosophical, more sociological approach to communitarianism as it explored individual Americans’ lack of a “language of community” and consequent difficulties in thinking about life in other than individualistic terms. And less academic, more popular versions of communitarianism have come to find expression in later communitarian works⁷ (like Amitai Etzioni’s *The Spirit of Community*) and even social movements (some might suggest, for example, that Canada’s Reform Party

incorporates a vague sort of communitarianism). As is the case with any philosophical school, the opinions and prescriptions of communitarians vary. A brief review of the work of the major communitarian philosophers reveals however that their commonalities are greater than their differences. As their rubric suggests, communitarians see neither a universal rationality nor the individual but rather the *community* as the source of moral authority in human life.

Michael Sandel's *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice* (Sandel, 1982) is seen by many as having been the opening salvo in the communitarian attack against liberalism. Taking as it did the form of an extended critique of the liberalism of John Rawls, Sandel's work nicely set the scene for the liberal-communitarian debate that followed, setting out most of the major anti-liberal themes of communitarian thought.

Sandel begins his criticism of Rawlsian liberalism at Rawls' own starting point, the "original position". The original position, by now an idea as well known in political philosophy as Hobbes' state of nature, or Marx' notion of the alienation of the worker from the means of production, is a philosophical construct in which individuals who are conceived as being behind a "veil of ignorance" obscuring from them their own personal attributes (physical assets, intelligence, ambition, gender, race, nationality), beliefs, ends, and relationships, are imagined to negotiate the terms of justice (political, legal, social, and distributive) for the world they will live in once the veil has been lifted.⁸

Sandel argues that the parameters of the original position are implicitly based on the unwarranted assumption that human selves are "antecedently individuated". Only by conceiving of humans as individual beings ultimately disconnectable and separate from their relationships with others could one imagine the veil of ignorance as an appropriate constraint on decision-

making. Rawls, like all liberals, conceives of a self that exists outside of and at a distance from its personal attributes, beliefs, ends, and relationships. But

[o]ne consequence of this distance is to put the self beyond the reach of experience, to make it invulnerable, to fix its identity once more and for all. No commitment could grip me so deeply that I could not understand myself without it. No transformation of life purposes and plans could be so unsettling as to disrupt the contours of my identity. No project could be so essential that turning away from it would call into question the person I am. Given my independence from the values I have, I can always stand apart from them. . .

(Sandel, 1982, p. 62)

Sandel rejects this understanding of our human identity:

. . . a self so thoroughly independent as this rules out any conception of the good (or of the bad) bound up with possession in the constitutive sense. It rules out the possibility of any attachment (or obsession) able to reach beyond our values and sentiments to engage our identity itself. It rules out the possibility of a public life in which, for good or ill, the identity as well as the interests of the participants could be at stake. And it rules out the possibility that common purposes and ends could inspire more or less expansive self-understandings and so define a community in the constitutive sense, a community describing the subject and not just the objects of shared aspirations.

(Sandel, 1982, p. 62)

In this view, our identities are tied up with our ends and our relationships. We cannot construct a valid morality from behind a veil of ignorance, for such a veil obscures what are in reality *crucial* aspects of our identities.

Sandel argues instead for a conception of the self which is non-antecedently individuated, for “what we might call ‘intersubjective’ or ‘intrasubjective’ forms of self-understanding” (Sandel, 1982, p. 62). These forms of self-understanding are based not on the idea that the self is a

singular, atomistic, independent entity, but rather one subject to influences at levels above and below that inherent in the Rawlsian, liberal conception of the self. Intersubjective conceptions see “selfhood” as embracing at times more than one individual:

[i]ntersubjective conceptions allow that in certain moral circumstances, the relevant description of the self may embrace more than a single, individual human being, as when we attribute responsibility or affirm an obligation to a family or community or class or nation rather than to some particular human being.

(Sandel, 1982, pp. 62 - 3)

Intrasubjective conceptions envision “selfhood” as incorporating more than one identity within an individual:

Intrasubjective conceptions, on the other hand, allow that for certain purposes, the appropriate description of the moral subject may refer to a plurality of selves within a single, individual human being, as when we account for inner deliberation in terms of the pull of competing identities, or moments of introspection in terms of occluded self-knowledge, or when we absolve someone from responsibility for the heretical beliefs ‘he’ held before his religious conversion.

(Sandel, 1982, p. 63)

But Sandel’s rejection of Rawlsianism is not limited to its atomistic, individualistic conception of the self. He also shuns its other extreme, rejecting any of its implications of the existence of some universal community to which all mankind belongs. In speaking of Rawls’ assertion of the “need to arrange distributive schemes so as to further the ‘common interest’ and to ‘serve ‘prior and independent social ends’” (Sandel, 1982, p. 146), Sandel argues that

[w]e might summarize the difficulties with this assumption as follows: . . . there is no such thing as ‘the society as a whole’, or ‘the more general

society', taken in the abstract, no single 'ultimate' community whose preeminence just goes without argument or further description. Each of us moves in an indefinite number of communities, some more inclusive than others, each making different claims on our allegiance, and there is no saying in advance which is *the* society or community whose purposes should govern the disposition of any particular set of our attributes and endowments.

(Sandel, 1982, p. 146)

If we are products of the intersubjective influences of our community or communities, then the existence of many communities implies the existence of many possible moral schemata, not the singular, ultimate one Rawls professes.

Given his opposition to both individualism and universalism, it is unsurprising that Sandel also rejects Rawls' liberal notion of the existence of an absolutely clear distinction between the (universal) right and the (individual) good (implied in Rawlsianism's First Principle of maximal basic liberty for all (Rawls, 1971, p. 250)). Sandel's denial of the validity of this distinction rests on at least three grounds.

First, Sandel argues that although the Rawlsian requirement of maximal basic liberty for all is founded largely on its necessity to ensure conditions in which actors can act as moral agents⁹ -- by having the opportunity to make free moral choices, for example -- the Rawlsian understanding of choice makes such agency morally trivial. Choosers in the Rawlsian world view, according to Sandel, are not making *moral* decisions, but simply canvassing their own idiosyncratic preferences:

[w]hen Rawls writes that it is 'left to the agent himself to *decide* what it is he most wants' (416), and that 'we just have to *decide* which plans we most prefer' (551), the 'decision' the agent must make amounts to nothing more than an estimate or psychic inventory of the wants and preferences he already has, not a choice of the values he would profess or the aims he would pursue.

(Sandel, 1982, p. 162)¹⁰

In such circumstances, choices are entirely subjective, and therefore, according to Sandel, without true moral content.

This leads into Sandel's second reason for rejecting Rawls' distinction between the right (or justice, as Rawls describes it) and the good. Sandel's argument goes something like this. Rawls' First Principle of justice ensures for individuals in a society governed by it, the right to make free choices of their own good. But if those goods are morally subjective, not in themselves right, then what is the purpose of securing them by a rule of right like the First Principle? Why should the right be prior to the good, if the right is only part of the good? In short, the Rawlsian conception of the good corrodes and makes indefensible the Rawlsian conception of justice:

[i]f the good is nothing more than the indiscriminate satisfaction of arbitrarily-given preferences, regardless of worth, it is not difficult to imagine that the right (and for that matter a good many other sorts of claims) must outweigh it. But in fact the morally diminished status of the good must inevitably call into question the status of justice as well. For once it is conceded that our conceptions of the good are morally arbitrary, it becomes difficult to see why the highest of all (social) virtues should be the one that enables us to pursue these arbitrary conceptions 'as fully as the circumstances permit'.

(Sandel, 1982, p. 168)

The final ground of Sandel's rejection of the notion of distinct realms of justice or right and the good relates back to his advocacy of an inter-subjective, community-based understanding of human selfhood. Sandel points out that notions of the good are founded upon an individualistic understanding of the self in which the individual is seen as having to decide for himself and on his own terms what the good is. But if we have a self-understanding that incorporates others outside of ourselves, locating us in shared communities, then our individual understandings of the good will not be so idiosyncratic. In that case, our good will be evident to, and shared by others, as we will know

and share their good:

. . . in so far as our constitutive self-understandings comprehend a wider subject than the individual alone, whether a family or tribe or city or class or nation or people, to this extent they define a community in the constitutive sense. And what marks such a community is not merely a spirit of benevolence, or the prevalence of communitarian values, or even certain 'shared final ends' alone, but a common vocabulary of discourse and a background of implicit practices and understandings within which the opacity of the participants is reduced if never finally dissolved.

(Sandel, 1982, pp. 172 - 3)

Under circumstances such as these in which there is a shared understanding of the good and of our fellow members of the community, the need for and even the meaning of the liberal distinction between the right and the good breaks down. The two merge:

[i]n so far as justice depends for its preeminence on the separateness or boundedness of persons in the cognitive sense, its priority would diminish as that opacity faded and this community deepened.

(Sandel, 1982, p. 173)

These wide-ranging criticisms of Rawlsian liberalism can be distilled into three main concerns on Sandel's part. First, the attitudes generated by the instrumental, individual view of the political realm presupposed by Rawlsianism can seep into and poison non-political life. As Stephen Mulhall and Adam Swift note:

[a]ccording to Sandel, a Rawlsian polis would force its citizens to think of themselves as participants in a scheme of mutual cooperation, deriving advantages they could not have gained by their own efforts, but tied to their fellow citizens by bonds whose severance or alteration would change their identity as persons. Moreover, the conception of the person that grounds this limited conception of politics also distorts our understanding of non-political relationships -- ones

in which the relevant others stand to us not as citizens but as fellow party members, religious believers or relatives.

(Mulhall and Swift, 1992, p. 54)

Secondly, the aspirations of Rawlsianism to universal applicability ignore the possibility of stronger, more local communal attachments to “a family or tribe or city or class or nation or people” with whom we share “a common vocabulary of discourse and a background of implicit practices and understandings” (Sandel, 1982, pp. 172 - 3). Thirdly, the Rawlsian understanding of moral agency dictates an unfounded, meaningless, subjective morality of the individual.

In Sandel’s eyes, a solution to these problems requires a reconception of the role of the community in our lives. We must connect ourselves to our specific community by embracing

. . . loyalties and convictions whose moral force consists partly in the fact that living by them is inseparable from understanding ourselves as the particular persons we are -- as members of this family or community or nation or people, as bearers of this history, as sons and daughters of that revolution, as citizens of this republic.

(Sandel, 1982, p. 179)

In so doing, our communities can provide for us not only the communality we seek as connected selves, but a clearer and non-subjective moral order capable of providing meaning to our moral choices.

Like Michael Sandel, Michael Walzer concerns himself with issues of distributive justice. But where Sandel’s work is primarily a reaction to and critique of the liberalism of John Rawls, Walzer’s is a more elaborate and independent proposal for an alternative way of understanding the idea of distributive justice. It has its early formulation in *Spheres of Justice: A Defence of Pluralism and Equality* (1983) and later elaboration in

Interpretation and Social Criticism (1987).

The foundation of Walzer's argument is his contention that a given distribution of goods is just or unjust according to the meaning of the goods themselves. This idea stands in opposition both to quasi-Marxist views that distributive justice depends on an overall result (a general equality of condition) and to libertarian positions like that of Robert Nozick who argues that distributive justice depends on the justice of the distributive process (just acquisition and voluntary exchange, for example (Nozick, 1974, p. 151)). Where the former views focus on the state of individuals relative to the society-at-large and the latter on exchanges between individuals, Walzer focusses on the goods which are being distributed. And by 'goods' he means virtually all human products; not just food and consumer items, but other goods such as education, medical care, legal rights, economic opportunities and jobs, and so on.

The meaning of all such goods is socially-determined according to Walzer. No good has an inherent valuation or meaning outside of its value as understood by *people*. It is for this reason that Walzer declares all "goods with which distributive justice is concerned" to be social goods (Walzer, 1983, p. 7). And this understanding of the meaning of goods has two significant consequences for any theory of distributive justice.

First, the idea of an *individual* valuation of such goods becomes incomprehensible in this picture. Goods cannot be "idiosyncratically valued" (Walzer, 1983, p. 7) outside of a social context. Even the most obvious rebuttals to this idea which might spring to mind are readily turned aside by Walzer. Indeed,

[s]ome domestic objects are cherished for private and sentimental reasons, but only in cultures where sentiment regularly attaches to such objects. A beautiful sunset, the smell of new-mown hay, the excitement of an urban vista: these perhaps are

privately valued goods, though they are also, and more obviously, the objects of cultural assessment. Even new inventions are not valued in accordance with the ideas of their creators; they are subject to a wider process of conception and creation.
(Walzer, 1983, p. 7)

Secondly, because goods have socially-determined meanings, no *universal* valuation can be given them. They have different meanings in different communities at different times. This is why Walzer describes his philosophical venture as one in which he “stand[s] in the cave, in the city, on the ground” (Walzer, 1983, p. xiv):

[j]ustice is a human construction, and it is doubtful that it can be made in only one way. At any rate, I shall begin by doubting, and more than doubting, this standard philosophical assumption.
(Walzer, 1983, p. 5)

The meaning of goods is socially-, communally-given, and therefore issues of distributive justice must be settled locally, within a given community’s “intellectual structure”:

[t]here are no external or universal principles that can replace it [such a structure]. Every substantive account of distributive justice is a local account.
(Walzer, 1983, p. 341)

Thus, much of *Spheres of Justice* is made up of descriptions of actual such local accounts of justice.¹¹

Having set out his argument for an understanding of justice as communally- rather than individually- or universally-determined, Walzer goes on to assert that societies which permit goods to be distributed without regard to their socially-determined meanings invite “tyranny”, taking as his definition of that term Pascal’s assertion that “[t]he nature of tyranny is to desire power over the whole world and outside its own sphere” (Walzer, 1983,

p. 17). Tyranny in the distributive scheme of things occurs when the possession of one good permits its holder to acquire other goods whose meaning would otherwise require an autonomous distribution: one's monopoly over good "x" allows one to preferentially acquire good "y" as well.

In liberal societies, distribution of all but a few goods is mediated via money. This creates a tyranny of wealth as those with a monopoly in that realm use it to establish their preeminence and disproportional claim to other social goods (like education and health care¹²) whose meanings are not money-related (Mulhall and Swift, 1992, p. 147). In so doing, we run roughshod over the communally-determined understandings of such goods and subject ourselves to the "tyranny of money". And while the tyranny of money is less frightening than the pure tyranny of power, it

. . . is tyranny still, and it can make for harsh forms of domination. And if resistance is less heroic than in totalitarian states, it is hardly less important.
(Walzer, 1983, p. 317)

One possible solution to this problem is to seek to apply the principle of "simple equality". This conception holds equality to be an absolute:

[s]imple equality is a simple distributive condition, so that if I have fourteen hats and you have fourteen hats, we are equal.
(Walzer, 1983, p. 18)

This, however, is a distributive scheme which is in practice both difficult to establish and administer (as communist states have found over time) and all but impossible to maintain.¹³ Monopolies, in Walzer's eyes, are an unavoidable fact of human life.

But it is possible to construct a system in which a monopoly in one "sphere" does not overlap another. Walzer calls this sort of arrangement a

system of “complex equality”. Under such a scheme, different spheres of justice govern different goods according to their social meanings. As examples of spheres with different meanings, Walzer suggests the realms of politics, medical care, education for one’s children, and entrepreneurial opportunities. The goods in each of these spheres have different social meanings, and their distributional principles ought not to be conflated:

[t]he regime of complex equality is the opposite of tyranny. It establishes a set of relationships such that domination is impossible. In formal terms, complex equality means that no citizen’s standing in one sphere or with regard to one social good can be undercut by his standing in some other sphere, with regard to some other good. Thus, citizen X may be chosen over citizen Y for political office, and then the two of them will be unequal in the sphere of politics. But they will not be unequal generally so long as X’s office gives him no advantages over Y in any other sphere -- superior medical care, access to better schools for his children, entrepreneurial opportunities, and so on.

(Walzer, 1983, p. 19)

For Walzer, tyranny of the type he describes can only be avoided by paying heed to what the community understands as the meaning of our social goods. Any other distributive principle (including those inherent in liberal individualism) is certain to offend against the true meaning of such goods, and as such will be unjust.

Charles Taylor’s communitarian vision finds expression in two main works. The first is the large and complex *Sources of the Self*, first published in 1989. The second is the briefer, airier *The Malaise of Modernity* (1991), aimed apparently as much at the general public as at the “academy”.¹⁴ Taylor takes much less of a prescriptive tone than do any of his fellow communitarians, asserting that his goal is simply to “articulate and write a history of the modern identity” (Taylor, 1989b, p. ix). In so doing, though, he sets out a

theory of morality which, like those of other communitarians, firmly locates the source of moral authority in a communal context.

Taylor begins *Sources of the Self* by lamenting the “widespread ‘naturalistic’ temper” of our modern times which denies the validity of the moral “frameworks” of our past (Taylor, 1989b, p. 22). We live in a time when

. . . the developing ‘disenchantment’ of modern culture . . . has undermined so many traditional frameworks and, indeed, created the situation in which our old horizons have been swept away and all frameworks may appear problematical. . .

(Taylor, 1989b, p. 26)

But the naturalistic understanding of the world is, according to Taylor, a misguided one. There can be no morality without such horizons.

Taylor’s conception of morality is built around the idea of “intelligibility”: to be capable of construction as “moral”, statements and actions must be understandable and capable of explanation to others in moral terms. The source of morality cannot sensibly therefore be the individual, for what is morally significant is not up to individuals to determine. People, Taylor argues, cannot

. . . determine what is significant, either by decision, or perhaps unwittingly and unwillingly by just feeling that way. This is crazy. I couldn’t just *decide* that the most significant action is wiggling my toes in warm mud. Without a special explanation, this is not an intelligible claim.

(Taylor, 1991, p. 36)

By way of illustration, we might imagine our response -- nausea for example -- to something we find repugnant. Our instinctive response in such circumstances is on the surface little different than our response to, say, some food we disliked: a matter of “taste”, not readily explainable to others (Mulhall and Swift, 1992, pp. 102 - 3). What makes such a response and the attitude

underlying it a *moral* one is its connectedness to a moral schemata that we share with others. Through reference to such a scheme, our reactions “make sense” and can be explained and justified to our fellows. Only then, against what Taylor calls a “background of intelligibility” (Taylor, 1991, p. 37), do our responses take on a moral significance.

What provides intelligibility in such a background is our location in a moral community with a language of discourse¹⁵ shared by others like ourselves (Taylor, 1989b, p. 35). As Taylor notes, “to study persons is to study beings who only exist in or are partly constituted by a certain language” (Taylor, 1989b, pp. 34 - 5). And a language:

. . . only exists in and is maintained within a language community. .
One is a self among other selves. A self can never be described without reference to those who surround it.
(Taylor, 1989b, p. 35)

In short, the source of real moral authority must reside at a higher level than the individual himself.

At the same time, it should be remembered that we cannot posit the existence of a singular community as our authoritative source of morality: there are many such communities. This is implicit in Taylor’s metaphor of “language”. Just as there are many languages, so too will there be many moral communities (Mulhall and Swift, 1992, p. 110). The non-universality of the moral community is also inherent in Taylor’s understanding of how moral reasoning occurs. He argues that human reasoning about the good is *transitional*. In this view, we move from the set of beliefs implicit in one moral horizon to the set of beliefs implicit in another by recognizing an “epistemic gain” in the new framework (Mulhall and Swift, 1992, p. 115) -- that is, by seeing that our new horizon makes more sense and is more justifiable to us than our previous one. We are never in a position to stand

free of any moral framework on an Archimedean point of reasoning: we are always connected to the framework of our time and place even as we attempt to leave it behind. Thus, even the morality of philosophers aspiring to a *tabula rasa* as starting point is tied to the framework or horizon in which they find themselves. Rawls' claim for the universal applicability of his notion of the right, in fact any liberal's claim about the universalizability of his or her conception of the right, cannot stand in such a view.

Each language community, then, has its own moral horizon or framework which provides the background against which measurements of moral significance can be made. Each such community expresses its notion of morality in what Taylor calls its "hypergood". A hypergood is the transcendental good (or set of goods) in a moral community which trumps all others and orders the ethical priorities of its members. A belief in God and religion, for example, sets out the appropriate and most highly valued goals for a believer, as well as imposing certain strictures upon him which occasionally prevent him from acting to attain some of his lesser goods:

[to] think, feel, judge within such a framework is to function with the sense that some action, or mode of life, or mode of feeling is incomparably higher than the others which are more readily available to us.

(Taylor, 1989b, p. 19)

It is the notion of hypergoods upon which Taylor hangs one of his most significant criticisms of liberalism. He argues that all moral languages (of which he asserts liberalism is one) have their own hypergoods. The liberal hypergood includes notions of freedom, altruism, and universalism. But at the same time this good requires liberals to disavow the very idea of a hypergood:

[i]t seems that they [liberal theorists] are motivated by the strongest moral ideals, such as freedom, altruism, and universalism. These are amongst the central moral aspirations of modern culture, the hypergoods which are distinctive to it. And yet what these ideals

drive the theorists toward is a denial of all such goods. They are caught in a strange, pragmatic contradiction, whereby the very goods which move them push them to deny or denature all such goods. They are constitutionally incapable of coming clean about the deeper sources of their own thinking.
(Taylor, 1989b, p. 88)

In essence, Taylor rejects the viability of any notion of the good as subordinate to the right. The very existence of a hypergood establishes a moral standard that applies to *all* goods in a way which makes it self-contradictory to argue for distinct realms.

Taylor also echoes Michael Sandel's view on this issue, arguing that a realm of good within which choices are totally free would be a realm in which such choices possessed no moral significance. Citing sexual preference as an example, Taylor argues that the ever reduced importance our modern society attributes to this choice -- by which having a hetero- or homosexual orientation has come to be seen as being a choice on the order of one's preference for blondes or brunettes -- has made the choice morally trivial. Unless the choice is an important one, the mere act of choosing does not represent real moral agency. As Taylor concludes:

[i]t may be important that my life be chosen, as John Stuart Mill asserts in *On Liberty*, but unless some options are more significant than others, the very idea of self-choice falls into incoherency.
(Taylor, 1991, p. 39)

Moral significance requires reference to a hypergood and through that to a moral community, a reference which denies the validity of the liberal distinction between the right and the good.

In Taylor's view, morally-significant choices require a background of intelligibility against which moral significance can be determined. Only the meaningful moral scheme provided by a values framework shared with others

in our moral community can provide such a background. Taylor looks to the frameworks of our past (such as Judaeo-Christian theism (Taylor, 1989b, p. 521)) as possible “sources of the self”, and concludes his book of the same title by declaring that

[t]he intention of this work was one of retrieval, an attempt to uncover buried goods through rearticulation -- and thereby to make these sources again empower, to bring the air back again into the half-collapsed lungs of the spirit.

(Taylor, 1989b, p. 520)

Like Charles Taylor, Alasdair MacIntyre looks to the communal frameworks of the past as the sources of real moral authority needed in the modern world. MacIntyre’s main communitarian works are *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (among the earliest of communitarian analyses, having been first published in 1981), and *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (1988). Each book contains both an empirical element -- an examination of the moral systems and ways of life of a number of the great societies of the past which MacIntyre sees as models for today -- and a theoretical component -- a more abstract analysis of the moral frameworks of such societies undertaken with a view to discovering how we might emulate them.

MacIntyre’s work finds its inspiration in his concern that “[t]here seems to be no rational way of securing moral agreement in our culture” (MacIntyre, 1981, p. 6). As a result, moral deliberation in the modern world has taken on a fundamentally meaningless cast. MacIntyre sees his task, therefore, as being to “attempt to say both what makes it rational to act in one way rather than another and what makes it rational to advance and defend one concept of practical rationality rather than another” (MacIntyre, 1988, p. ix). Practical rationality is that rationality concerned with issues of morality and justice, with how our society functions, and with how we live our lives.

MacIntyre's task is made difficult, however, by the absence of any universal source of moral truth in our world. There are, rather, according to MacIntyre, only particularistically true local "rationalities" (hence the title *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*), each having an "historically and socially-context bound character" (MacIntyre, 1988, p. 4).

Given this, moral decisions and life choices can be made in one of two ways. One can act on the basis of an idiosyncratic, subjective, personal morality, as in our modern world. MacIntyre argues, however, that this individualistic standard has bad consequences. It is based ultimately on an emotivist understanding of the idea of morality, in which statements like "that is immoral" are understood to mean merely "I dislike that". This understanding of morality leads us, according to MacIntyre, to manipulative and selfish relationships with others. Rather than debating with our fellows the morality of a given issue, we attempt to "sell" them on our own, idiosyncratic position. Since we share no foundational principles with others, we can do little else in this view.

Our second alternative in a world of multiple sources of morality is to choose to live within one of the particularistic rationalities that exist, taking its guidance for one's moral choices and life pattern. In choosing the latter, MacIntyre asserts, we can recover "the lost morality of the past" (MacIntyre, 1981, p. 21) and restore objectivity to our moral decision-making.

In defining the particularistic rationalities he advocates, MacIntyre begins by describing what he calls "practices". Within any given society there exist a variety of practices, which can be defined as

. . . any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realised in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and

human conceptions of the ends and goods involved, are systematically extended. Tic-tac-toe is not an example of a practice in this sense, nor is throwing a football with skill; but the game of football is, and so is chess. Bricklaying is not a practice; architecture is. Planting turnips is not a practice; farming is. So are the enquiries of physics, chemistry, and biology, and so is the work of the historian, and so are painting and music. . . . Thus the range of practices is wide: arts, sciences, games, politics in the Aristotelian sense, the making and sustaining of family life, all fall under the concept.

(MacIntyre, 1981, p. 175)

Humans naturally seek to engage in practices of relevance and interest to them, and successful participation requires of them certain virtues,

. . . acquired human qualit[ies] the possession and exercise of which tends to enable us to achieve those goods which are internal to practices and the lack of which effectively prevents us from achieving any such goods.

(MacIntyre, 1981, p. 178)

Every practice requires of those engaged in it the virtues of justice, courage, and truthfulness (MacIntyre, 1981, p. 179), for in order to achieve excellence in a practice,

[w]e have to learn to recognize what is due to whom; we have to be prepared to take whatever self-endangering risks are demanded along the way; and we have to listen carefully to what we are told about our own inadequacies and to reply with the same carefulness for the facts.

(MacIntyre, 1981, p. 179)

These virtues, however, take different forms in different practices. The courage required in the practice of automobile racing, for example -- taking one's vehicle so close to its and one's own limits that a small driving error could result in death -- differs from the courage required in the practice of art

-- say, trying a new technique of expression in one's medium at the risk of its possible contemptuous rejection by the authorities in one's field. Because we have in any given society a multiplicity of practices, there are engendered by differences such as these a variety of conflicting conceptions of the virtues, and from these, differing moral beliefs and opposing social institutions embodying those different values. In such circumstances, objective moral judgments are an impossibility.

But filling this void in the historical societies whose moral objectivity MacIntyre lauds are *traditions*. A tradition is an overarching, relatively well organized system of belief which orders and evaluates the goods of its society's practices in a definitive and authoritative way (MacIntyre, 1981, p. 188). It accomplishes this in two ways. First, it sets out a *telos* -- defining a purpose and meaning for life -- for its community's inhabitants "which transcends the limited goods of practices by constituting the good of a whole human life" (MacIntyre, 1981, p. 189). We might imagine, for example, that in a society in which man's *telos* is conceived as being living according to the will of God (as in any of the Christian traditions), the practice of Biblical scholarship would be of greater worth and purpose than the practice of, say, entrepreneurship. Secondly, a society's great tradition establishes a mode of rational enquiry within which issues of practical rational -- morality and justice -- can be debated and determined (MacIntyre, 1988, p. 349). The society's great tradition helps set out what issues are of importance, what constitutes a rational analysis of such issues, and what constitute the major "facts" of life.

A tradition also sets out to a great extent its community's morality, social structure, and social roles:

. . . theories of justice and practical rationality confront us as aspects of traditions, allegiance to which requires the living out of some more or less systematically embodied form of human life, each with its own specific modes of social relationship,

each with its own canons of interpretation and explanation in respect of the behaviour of others, each with its own evaluative practices.
(MacIntyre, 1988, p. 391)

We might, for example, imagine that in the Christian society hypothesized above, priests would rank more highly and have a more formalized, authoritative role in the social structure than would their entrepreneurial counterparts.

The great tradition of a community finds its expression in two main ways. Its core concepts and central tenets have their root expression in one or a few “canonical texts” of great authority and influence.¹⁶ These texts, usually established at the very founding of a great tradition, set out in a formal and authoritative way the basic precepts of the tradition’s mode of rational enquiry. But the tradition of a community is, MacIntyre notes, not a forever-ordained, stagnant, and unquestioned dogma. A tradition is also expressed, revised, and elaborated over long periods of time through internal debate within the modes of rational enquiry it has established between various debaters who hold different views of the meaning of their society’s great tradition.¹⁷ MacIntyre aptly describes this as “tradition-constituting and tradition-constitutive debate” (MacIntyre, 1988, p. 390). Such debate is sometimes inspired by the occasional epistemological crises of the great traditions, which arise when those who live under them come to question the legitimacy and justification of their community’s reigning tradition’s central tenets. These crises can occur when a tradition suddenly encounters new challenges (from a changed environment or in confrontation with another society with a conflicting tradition, for example) or when debate and elaboration around a society’s great tradition reaches a point at which philosophical questions arise for which answers have as yet not been devised.

Such crises can only be resolved, according to MacIntyre, when those engaged in a tradition's rational debate and enquiry come up with answers which, while maintaining fundamental continuity with the past, end the crisis and explain why it arose in the first place (MacIntyre, 1988, p. 361). Traditions, then, while based on some initial expression or set of expressions embodied in a canonical text or texts, are capable of self-driven, evolutionary change.

We see, then, that a tradition provides for its community a *telos*, a systematic mode of rational enquiry, guidelines for its social structure, and a system of morality. These in turn provide an objective basis for moral decision-making within the context of the society in which they function. The tradition of a community is its source of truth, and, for those who live under such a tradition, that truth is an absolute. MacIntyre asserts that:

. . . genuinely to adopt the standpoint of a tradition thereby commits one to its view of what is true and false and, in so committing one, prohibits one from adopting any rival standpoint. . . . The multiplicity of traditions does not afford a multiplicity of perspectives among which we can move, but a multiplicity of antagonistic commitments, between which only conflict, rational or nonrational, is possible.

(MacIntyre, 1988, pp. 367 - 8)

To find oneself living in a mediaeval society founded on a Christian tradition, then, would be to find oneself committed to its views on the divinity of Christ, the existence of God, the truths of the Bible, the authority of the priesthood, and so on. Furthermore, to find oneself within such a tradition is to find oneself committed in a way in which it is difficult to imagine a significantly different alternative, for the validity and truth of a community's mode of rational enquiry is determined *within* the bounds of its constituting tradition, and not by comparison or reference to any external standard of truth. As MacIntyre notes:

. . . there is no other way to engage in the formulation, elaboration, rational justification, and criticism of accounts of practical rationality and justice except from within some one particular tradition . . .

(MacIntyre, 1988, p. 350)

Thus, in a society of the type MacIntyre advocates, one's source of objective moral standards, one's truth, is the community's reigning tradition.

Aristoteleanism, the tradition to which MacIntyre professes his own adherence (MacIntyre, 1988, p. 402), serves well as an exemplar of these concepts. Aristoteleanism's canonical texts are, of course, Aristotle's *Ethics* and *Politics*, which together set out the *telos* of Greek citizens (the pursuit of the good for man through politics) and non-citizens (service to citizens), which in turn establishes their society's social roles (citizens, dependents, slaves) and justifies its power structure (a democratic aristocracy). And the tradition of Aristoteleanism has evolved and adapted over time, as philosophers from Aquinas to Alasdair MacIntyre have debated and modified it throughout its history.¹⁸ And for those who lived in a classical Greek society in which the Aristotelian paradigm reigned, its insights and guidelines were *truths*. Other traditions which fit MacIntyre's paradigm include Augustinianism, Thomism, and to some degree liberalism, all of which are discussed in *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*. This list is not, however, exhaustive, as many great traditions have existed over time.¹⁹

In MacIntyre's view, these lost moralities can only be restored in our modern context by returning to the unitary moral structure of past great societies. It is this fact which underlies his great admiration for the ancient moral communities and his advocacy of their reconstruction in our present, in the form of "local communities" within which single, particularistic rationalities would reign (MacIntyre, 1981, p. 245).

These brief summaries of the philosophies of Michael Sandel, Michael Walzer, Charles Taylor, and Alasdair MacIntyre reveal the variety and range of communitarian thought. Equally important, though, they also reveal a significant commonality in communitarian criticisms of liberalism and modernity. Communitarians reject *both* liberal sources of morality: universal reason,²⁰ expressed in the notion of the right, and individual subjectivism, expressed in the notion of the good.

Communitarians argue that there is no universally applicable system of moral reasoning. This view underlies Sandel's rejection of Rawlsianism, Walzer's claim for the relativity of justice, Taylor's assertion that reasoned moral arguments take place in a social context, and MacIntyre's advocacy of tradition-based systems of moral reasoning. And even when communitarians acknowledge some role for a universally-valid system of reasoning, they argue that the scope of such rationality is so narrow as to make it virtually useless for the determination of most of life's moral questions.²¹ Because there is no universal system of reasoning, there can be no singular source of morality applicable to all peoples or all times.

On the other hand, individually-determined morality (which, in the liberal scheme of things is necessitated by reason's limited reach) is in communitarian eyes equally invalid. Sandel asserts that those positing an individually-based morality are wrongly failing to take into account the inter-subjectiveness of being and ignoring our understanding of ourselves as being, in many cases, part of a larger whole than ourselves; Walzer, that the meanings of goods including those of justice are determined socially and that it is therefore nonsensical to talk about individual valuations; Taylor, that the very meaning of morality requires non-individual standards; and MacIntyre, that individualist standards lead to emotivist and manipulative social

relationships. Because individuals cannot sensibly be the source of a meaningful morality, the liberal understanding of the existence of the “good” cannot hold.

It is perhaps the second of these two sources of liberal morality -- individualism -- which communitarians dislike the most, for it is here where they locate the “malaise of modernity” which they seem to universally fear. Communitarians argue most strenuously that individualism cannot be the source of morality and ethics; we need, rather, “broader moral horizons” whose authority derives from their transcendence of individual will²² and their reflection of communal values. The community in which we find ourselves “embedded” must be our source of authoritative moral standards. Communitarians are at their most eloquent when they address this issue, and as a group they paint a dismaying picture of where our moral individualism has led us in these modern times.

The Bellah group, for example, laments the fact that Americans no longer have a language or vocabulary which permits them to think or to express themselves in communal terms. The language of individualism makes justifying the non-individual aspects of their culture increasingly difficult for Americans (Bellah *et al.*, 1985, p. 21). As a result, they are becoming ever more like “Sheila”, one of the Bellah group’s interviewees, whose source of moral authority seems individualistic indeed:

[o]ne person we interviewed has actually named her religion (she calls it her “faith”) after herself. This suggests the logical possibility of over 220 million American religions, one for each of us. Sheila Larson is a young nurse who has received a good deal of therapy and who describes her faith as “Sheilaism”. “I believe in God. I’m not a religious fanatic. I can’t remember the last time I went to church. My faith has carried me a long way. It’s Sheilaism. Just my own little voice.” Sheila’s faith has some tenets beyond belief in God, though not many. In defining “my own Sheilaism,” she said: “it’s just try to love

yourself and be gentle with yourself. You know, I guess, take care of each other. I think He would want us to take care of each other.” Like many others, Sheila would be willing to endorse few more specific injunctions.

(Bellah *et al.*, 1985, pp. 220 - 1)

Michael Sandel worries that self-contained moral conceptions like those expressed by Sheila are destroying our ability to hold loyalties and moral convictions that extend beyond ourselves, that we are losing our ability to conceive of ourselves as members of a “family or community or nation or people” (Sandel, 1982, p. 179).

Michael Walzer speaks in even more dire terms, arguing that our modern, individualistic conception of all goods as having an individually-determined value convertible into a monetary price has brought us to the point of “tyranny”. Walzer’s concern is underlined by his use of the kind of language usually reserved for descriptions of Stalinist Russia or Hitler’s Germany rather than the liberal state.

It is Charles Taylor, though, whom we can credit for popularizing the very phrase “malaise of modernity” in his 1991 book so entitled. He opens *The Malaise of Modernity* this way:

I want to write here about some of the malaises of modernity. I mean by this features of our contemporary culture and society that people experience as a loss or decline, even as our civilization “develops”. Sometimes people feel that some important decline has occurred during the last years or decades . . . And sometimes the loss is felt over a much longer historical period: the whole modern era from the seventeenth century is frequently seen as the time frame of decline.

(Taylor, 1991, p. 1)

Taylor then goes on to identify the three “malaises” or worries of modernity. The first is the rise of individualism, which has brought with it the destruction

of our “older moral horizons” (Taylor, 1991, p. 3). While Taylor acknowledges that very few people would like to return to some of the oppressive orders of the past, he also points out that:

... at the same time as they [the old orders] restricted us, these orders gave meaning to the world and to the activities of social life. The discrediting of these orders has been called the “disenchantment” of the world. With it, things lost some of their magic.

(Taylor, 1991, p. 3)

But the loss of some of life’s “magic” has not been the only consequence of individualism’s rise. Individualism has also brought along with its sweeping away of the old orders modernity’s second malaise, an increasing emphasis on the use of “instrumental reason” -- “the kind of rationality we draw on when we calculate the most economical application of means to a given end” (Taylor, 1991, p. 5). Our moral and social decision-making is thus, according to Taylor, “no longer grounded in the order of things or the will of God”, but has become, rather, vague, chancy, selfish, and “in a sense up for grabs”. In place of the powerful moralities of the old orders, modernity’s ethic of the individual has left us with a moral relativism with no ability to actually specify moral outcomes.²³

The increasing use of instrumental reason as a tool of ethical deliberation has also encouraged us to begin calculating ever more regularly our *own* benefits in our relationships to others. This has brought with it the third of Taylor’s malaises, the destruction of the political, communal realm of life. Taylor points out that Alexis deTocqueville warned that a “society in which people end up as the kind of individuals who are ‘enclosed in their own hearts’ is one where few will want to participate actively in self-government” (Taylor, 1991, p. 9). In such circumstances, we increasingly face the peril of

“soft despotism”, as our governments come to be run *for* us rather than *by* us. Charles Taylor’s ultimate concern about morality is thus little less dramatic than Michael Walzer’s. For Christians, “the wages of sin is death”;²⁴ for communitarians, the wages of modernity is tyranny.

But perhaps the deepest note of despair for the avails of modernity is voiced by Alasdair MacIntyre. Like Taylor, MacIntyre sees our modern era as bringing about the corrosion of the authoritative moral horizons of our past. For lack of such horizons, MacIntyre argues, our moral decision-making has become selfish and meaningless. So imperilled are morality and civility by the current state of liberalism and modernity, that MacIntyre is led in *After Virtue* to note “certain parallels”

... between our own age in Europe and North America
and the epoch in which the Roman Empire declined
into the Dark Ages. . .

(MacIntyre, 1981, p. 245)

He goes on to conclude that

[a] crucial turning point in that earlier history occurred when men and women of good will turned aside from the task of shoring up the Roman imperium and ceased to identify the continuation of civility and moral community with the maintenance of that imperium. What they set themselves to achieve instead -- often not recognising fully what they were doing -- was the construction of new forms of community within which the moral life could be sustained so that both morality and civility might survive the coming ages of barbarism and darkness. If my account of our moral condition is correct, we ought also to conclude that for some time now we too have reached that turning point. What matters at this stage is the construction of local forms of community within which civility and the intellectual and moral life can be sustained through the new dark ages which are already upon us.

(MacIntyre, 1981, p. 245)

While MacIntyre's conclusion may represent the extreme of anti-liberal lamentations about the "malaise of modernity", its theme is shared by all the communitarians whose work we have examined. To a man, they argue that modernity's individualistic understanding of morality has brought us to an undesirable place. It is only by reembracing the broader moral horizons of community that we can avoid consequences like those just outlined. Such horizons connect us as individuals, locate us in the moral space of the community of which we are a part, and, most importantly, provide for us moral standards with real significance and meaning. It is the resurrection of the community as our source of moral authority which is communitarianism's clarion call.

Of course, liberal philosophers have not remained silent in the face of communitarian criticisms. Their responses have generally taken three forms: a defence of liberalism, a criticism of communitarianism for not meeting liberal ideals, and a criticism of communitarians for failing to provide a clearer outline of what their alternative societies would look like.

The first liberal response to the communitarian critique is perhaps the most natural -- a defence of liberalism. Many liberal scholars argue that not *all* liberal values are, as communitarians seem to suggest, subjective or individually self-referential. Will Kymlicka argues that liberal guarantees of freedom are not based on a hedonistic understanding of human nature, but on the premise that finding the good life is crucial to one's humanity:

[the] requirement of justice is *primary* because our interest in leading the good life is our most essential interest.

(Kymlicka, 1988, p. 184)

And Stephen Holmes points out that many of liberalism's moral precepts are in fact absolutes:

[the] opening sentence of Locke's *Treatise*, asserting that slavery is a "vile and miserable" condition, suggests a commitment to a nonarbitrary distinction between good and bad.

(Holmes, 1989, p. 243)

So too is it the case that

[t]he rule that you cannot make an exception of yourself is not a subjective preference. It is not a value we can choose or not as we please.

(Holmes, 1989, p. 243)

Defences of liberalism also point out that there are good reasons for that philosophy's conception of a bifurcated moral authority. Amy Gutmann notes that we live in a society in which people are not in agreement about the good, and that liberalism's overarching conception of justice cannot therefore but be limited:

[t]he major aim of liberal justice is to find principles appropriate for a society in which people disagree fundamentally over many questions, including such metaphysical questions as the nature of personal identity. Liberal justice therefore does not provide us with a comprehensive morality; it regulates our social institutions, not our entire lives. It makes claims on us 'not because it expresses our deepest self-understandings,' but because it represents the fairest possible *modus vivendi* for a pluralistic society.

(Gutmann, 1985, p. 313)

And Kymlicka argues that even the communally-embedded human ends as envisioned by communitarians like Michael Sandel must be chosen through *individual* judgment:

[f]or Sandel . . . the relevant question is not 'what should I be, what sort of life should I lead? but 'who am I?' The self 'comes by' its ends not 'by choice' but 'by discovery'.

But surely . . . Sandel . . . is violating our deepest self-understandings -- for nobody thinks this self-discovery replaces or forecloses judgments about how

to lead one's life. We don't consider ourselves trapped by our present attachments, incapable of judging the worth of the goods we inherited (or ourselves chose earlier). No matter how deeply implicated we find ourselves in a social practice or tradition, we feel capable of questioning whether the practice is a valuable one . . .

(Kymlicka, 1988, p. 191)

Both Gutmann's and Kymlicka's arguments deny the validity of the communitarian assertion that the community is the only source of meaningful morality.

Liberals defending their philosophy also argue that liberalism is not what communitarians attempt to make it out to be. Stephen Holmes, for example, asserts that anti-liberals are often attacking the philosophical equivalent of a straw-man when they analyze "liberalism":

[w]hen I write of "liberalism," I do not mean a vague *Zeitgeist* or the outlook of modern man but a clearly identifiable cluster of political principles and positions defended by, amongst others, Milton, Spinoza, Locke, Montesquieu, Hume, Voltaire, Smith, Kant, Madison, and J. S. Mill.

But what about the "typically liberal" doctrines ridiculed by contemporary anti-liberals? not a single one was espoused by *any* major liberal thinker.

(Holmes, 1989, pp. 236 - 7)

While the first liberal response to communitarian critiques is self-defence, the second is to take the offence by pointing out communitarianism's failure to meet *liberal* ideals. Liberals argue, for example, that societies based on the communitarian philosophy would exclude minorities. H. N. Hirsch points out that

. . . only individuals who share something can become, or remain, a true community, and whether that "something" is defined as a set of values, or an ideology, or a social position, either it must already exist -- and thus the population in question must be,

in some very basic way, homogeneous -- or it must be created and maintained . . .

(Hirsch, 1986, p. 435)

Thus,

. . . only a modern society that ruthlessly engages in the practice of exclusion can be homogeneous. Exclusion can come in many forms: It can be literal or conceptual, self-selected or imposed, formal-legal or functional. And it can produce the most vivid and morally abhorrent politics imaginable: Racism can be a form of conceptual exclusion and genocide a form of literal exclusion.

(Hirsch, 1986, p. 435)

Gutmann similarly takes Michael Sandel to task for his dreamy-eyed view of the history of societies based on communally-constituted moralities:

[w]hat exactly does Sandel mean to imply by the sort of civic republicanism "implicit within our traditions?" Surely not the mainstream of our tradition that excluded women and minorities, and repressed most significant deviations from white, Protestant morality in the name of the common good.

(Gutmann, 1985, pp. 318 - 19)

Liberals also point out that communitarian works seem generally to imply a turning away from the protection of *individual* rights, a circumstance which would bring with it varied undesirable consequences. Kymlicka notes the liberal worry that governments charged with encouraging communality will be oppressive (Kymlicka, 1988, p. 195). Holmes puts such worries in even more explicit terms. In discussing what he calls the anti-liberal propensity for "antonym-substitution" in discussing political history (in which he accuses such anti-liberals of painting as desirable what were in fact undesirable historical realities), Holmes notes that communitarians "prejudicially contrast 'rights with duties'",

. . . an opposition that makes the former seem mean-spirited and selfish. The original opposites of rights, however, were tyranny, slavery, and cruelty.
(Holmes, 1989, p. 251)

The third major liberal response to the communitarian critique is to point out that communitarians have failed to provide clearly delineated plans for societies based on their alternative. Stephen Holmes evocatively calls the non-specific communitarian ideal the “phantom community”, noting that

[a]ntiliberals typically evoke an indescribable community, employing a double standard to evaluate liberal and nonliberal social orders and conveniently eluding criticism of their own political ideals.
(Holmes, 1989, p. 229)

Amy Gutmann points specifically to Alasdair MacIntyre and Michael Sandel as transgressors in this regard: “. . . MacIntyre and Sandel say almost nothing in their books to defend communitarian politics directly” (Gutmann, 1985, p. 318). And H. N. Hirsch paints with an even broader brush, summarizing perhaps the general liberal response to the philosophies of the communitarians reviewed above when he points out that

[i]t is striking that *none* of the scholars under discussion here presents a straightforward account of the conditions necessary for creating a community, or of the mechanisms needed to maintain one.
(Hirsch, 1986, p. 433)

Liberals argue that communitarians have an unfair advantage in being able to put forward vaguely defined, ever-shifting alternatives to the actually existent liberal polities they attack, polities which naturally suffer from all the real-world failings any existent political system must face.²⁵ Even more importantly, the failure of communitarians to provide a fully realized portrait of their own vision puts into question how viable or desirable their

alternatives to liberalism would actually be.

To the first two of the three major liberal replies to communitarianism -- the defence of liberalism, and the criticism that communitarianism cannot meet liberalism's standards -- communitarians typically respond like Alasdair MacIntyre, who asserts that these kinds of debates are relevant only if one already accepts liberalism's basic premises:

[i]t is . . . unsurprising that in contemporary debates about justice and practical rationality one initial problem for those antagonistic to liberalism is that of either discovering or constructing some institutional forum or arena within which the terms of the debate have not already predetermined its outcome.

(MacIntyre, 1988, pp. 392 - 3)

That not *all* liberal values are subjective or that differentiation between the right and the good is necessary when a community is a disparate one is no answer, communitarians suggest, to their alternatives which envision both a unified moral system and through that a unified community. And that communitarianism cannot meet liberal standards is hardly seen as being a compelling counterclaim by those who reject all they see liberalism as having brought with it to the modern age.

The third major liberal response to communitarianism -- criticism of the unelaborated, unspecific nature of the communitarian ideal -- is, however, more telling. Much of communitarian thought does indeed appear to be antiliberal rather than procommunitarian. And what little is said by the communitarians about their alternatives is often vague and so optimistic as to immediately invite a skeptical response. Michael Sandel's *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice*, for example, is almost entirely anti-Rawlsian. As H. N. Hirsch points out,

Sandel presents a highly philosophical critique of Rawls which has, as its base, a romantic yearning for community -- for its ability to grip us, engage us,

transform us. But this yearning is highly abstract and nonspecific: *How, precisely, should a community be essential to our identities?*

(H. N. Hirsch, 1986, p. 429)

Michael Walzer's *Spheres of Justice*, while being more about communitarianism than liberalism, is equally subject to charges of nonspecificity. Walzer begins that book by declaring that his intention is "to get at" "how we might share, divide, and exchange" virtually every sort of good "if we were free from every sort of domination" (Walzer, 1983, p. xvi). A society based on such principles would be one in which public opinions determined the meaning and distribution of goods in a system of complex equality. But Walzer's explanation of how those opinions might be determined is unclear:

[t]here is a certain attitude of mind that underlies the theory of justice and that ought to be strengthened by the experience of complex equality: we can think of it as a decent respect for the opinions of mankind. Not the opinions of this or that individual, which may well deserve a brusque response: I mean those deeper opinions that are the reflections in individual minds, shaped also by individual thought, of the social meanings that constitute our common life.

(Walzer, 1983, p. 320)

Mulhall and Swift, pointing out the liberal response to such a view, note that

[f]or the liberal, concerned to guarantee the individual's freedom to pursue her own way of life, this may seem unhelpfully vague, especially if she suspects that there is real and significant disagreement within her culture about what the social meanings of goods actually are.

(Mulhall and Swift, 1992, p. 153)

One might imagine that it is not just liberals who would find Walzer's prescriptions "unhelpfully vague". Even the most ardent communitarian intent on establishing a society based on Walzerian teachings would likely

have difficulty here in knowing where to start.

While Charles Taylor's writings on communitarianism appear to offer more definitive answers to the question of how community and individual interconnect than do those of Sandel and Walzer, Taylor's communitarianism has other areas of unclearness. It is, for example, difficult at times to be certain that Taylor even fully rejects liberalism (Mulhall and Swift, 1992, p. 101). In "Cross-Purposes: the Liberal-Communitarian Debate", Taylor goes so far as to deny that the two philosophies are dichotomous and mutually-exclusive:

[t]he portmanteau terms "liberal and "communitarian" will probably have to be scrapped . . . because they carry the implication that there is only one issue here, or that someone's position on one determines what he holds on the other. But a cursory look at the gamut of actual philosophical positions shows exactly the contrary.

(Taylor, 1989a, p. 163)

Taylor's prescriptions for resolution of modernity's "malaise" are also less than clear. In discussing the place of the market-based economy in a more ideal society than we now have, Taylor asserts that "[o]ur challenge is actually to combine in some non-self-stultifying fashion a number of ways of operating, which are jointly necessary to a free and prosperous society but which also tend to impede each other..." (Taylor, 1991, p. 110). In discussing solutions to the growing preeminence of instrumental reason in our world, he argues that "... the force that can roll back the galloping hegemony of instrumental reason is (*the right kind of*) democratic initiative" (Taylor, 1991, p. 112, emphasis added). And in making suggestions aimed at bringing about a reduction in the atomistic bent of modern society, Taylor asks:

... how do you fight fragmentation? It's not easy, and there are no universal prescriptions. It depends very much on the particular situation. . . . There is a potential vicious circle here, but we can see

how it could also be a virtuous circle. Successful common action can bring a sense of empowerment and also strengthen the identification with the political community.

This sounds like saying that the way to succeed here is to succeed, which is true if perhaps unhelpful.
(Taylor, 1991, p: 118)

Unfortunately, this last observation applies to most of Taylor's recommendations in the closing pages of *The Malaise of Modernity*. A clear case for communitarianism requires more specifics than Taylor, or indeed most communitarians, are prepared to offer.

As was earlier suggested, however, one possible exclusion from this list of relatively unelaborated communitarian philosophies is that of Alasdair MacIntyre. While MacIntyre's work does not entirely escape criticism for imprecision, it is arguably the best developed of the communitarian alternatives. MacIntyre's notion of traditions as authoritative moral horizons, an idea similar in many respects to Charles Taylor's idea of a language community sharing a hypergood, is reasonably complete and of considerable appeal. And unlike Taylor, MacIntyre has not obscured the grounds of his opposition to liberalism by suggesting its compatibility with a more communitarian world. If we are to accommodate communitarian claims that their notions of the ideal community cannot fairly be examined from an external perspective while heeding liberal arguments that communitarians have not given us much to look at internally, then it is likely that MacIntyre's version of communitarianism will be our best choice for a deeper look at that philosophy.

In evaluating the claims of communitarian philosophy through our focus on MacIntyre's work, we might consider two main issues. The first is the question of where he locates the authority he asserts for the truths of the great traditions in their local contexts. MacIntyre, like other communitarians,

asserts that we must reembrace a community-borne morality to recapture meaningfulness for our moral life. But what is it about the morality of a given community's traditions that makes its prescriptions authoritative ones for its members?

The second main issue that must be confronted in assessing MacIntyre's communitarian vision is the validity of his claim that the shared moral horizons of community as expressed in his idea of a tradition represent a solution to the "malaise of modernity". In the pages below, I will show that MacIntyre's communitarian vision fails to meet this challenge.

Communitarians argue that an understanding of truths as being derived from the community one shares with others provides authoritative moral horizons, and that it is these shared moral horizons which can resolve the moral woes of our modern times brought on by liberalism's inability to provide such definitive value systems. But a deeper analysis of Alasdair MacIntyre's communitarian philosophy reveals it to have serious moral shortcomings at least as great as those it attributes to modernity.

Notes

- ¹ This descriptive phrase is taken from Charles Taylor's communitarianist book of the same title (Taylor, 1991).
- ² In the brief outline of the tenets of liberal thought in modern culture offered below, I stick closely to the more contemporary accounts of that philosophy offered by liberals like John Rawls and Robert Nozick. I would argue that it is against these exemplars of liberalism that communitarianism has defined itself (witness, for example, Michael Sandel's elaboration in *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice* (Sandel, 1982) of his communitarianism through a critique of Rawls' liberalism), and it is therefore a description of liberalism in these forms that is most apt for the task of outlining the modern liberal-communitarian debate. There are, of course, other, earlier accounts of the liberal philosophy (John Stuart Mill's, for example) which have a somewhat different emphasis than do their successors.
- ³ As expressed, for example, in Rawls (1972). For a brief description of Rawls' theory of justice, see footnote 8 below.
- ⁴ As expressed most definitively in Nozick (1974).
- ⁵ To these we might add numerous others, including John Stuart Mill's argument that individual liberty is necessary to advance culture. See, for example, "On the Liberty of Thought and Discussion" in *On Liberty*, where Mill argues for freedom of expression on the ground that "the peculiar evil of silencing the expression of an opinion is, that it is robbing the human race, posterity as well as the existing generation . . ." of the benefits of hearing that opinion (Mill, 1994 [1859], p. 85).
- ⁶ Daniel Bell describes this group as the "first wave" of communitarians (Bell, 1994, p. 5).
- ⁷ The "second wave" in Bell's terms (Bell, 1994, p. 5).
- ⁸ Rawls argues that those behind the veil of ignorance would opt for a society founded on two basic rules:

First Principle:

Each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive total system of equal basic liberties compatible with a similar system of liberty for all.

Second Principle:

Social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they are both:

- (a) to the greatest benefit of the least advantaged, consistent with the just savings principle, and
- (b) attached to offices and positions open to all under

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conditions of fair equality of opportunity.
(Rawls, 1972, p. 302)

9 Rawls' attempt to secure the opportunity for moral agency befits the Kantian heritage he claims for his work (see, for example, Rawls' article "Kantian Constructivism in Moral Theory" (Rawls, 1980)). Kant argued, for example -- and Rawls appears to agree -- that actions to which moral goodness can be attributed must come from a "good" (and therefore uncoerced) will (Kant, 1969 [1785], p. 11).

10 The numbers in the brackets of this quote refer to Rawls' *A Theory of Justice*. Sandel's edition of this work is the same as that cited in the bibliography of this work.

11 These are wide-ranging and fascinating. Walzer discusses, for example, communal provision for the needy in "*Athens in the Fifth and Fourth Centuries*"; meritocratic awarding of bureaucratic office in "*The Chinese Examination System*"; the importance of schools in "*The Aztec 'House of the Young Men'*"; and cooperative, employee-owned businesses like that of the "*San Francisco Scavengers*".

12 It should perhaps be pointed out that these two examples of liberal modernity's errant and valueless distributive principles apply almost exclusively to *American* liberal modernity. Virtually all the rest of societies living in liberal modernity make education and medical care available on terms other than the purely monetary.

13 As Robert Nozick points out in *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, any "patterned" system of distributive justice requires constant state intervention to maintain the pattern. In a free community, any morning's even distribution of hats will have been overturned by mid-afternoon through the process of free exchange (see Nozick, 1974, p. 163).

14 To use Taylor's own term for the intellectual community.

15 One need not necessarily read "language" in its literal sense here. Taylor is talking about *moral* "languages", not about languages in the linguistic sense.

16

. . . a tradition, if it is to flourish at all, as we have already learned, has to be embodied in a set of texts which function as the authoritative point of departure for tradition-constituted enquiry and which remain as essential points of reference for enquiry and activity, for argument, debate, and conflict within that tradition. Those texts to which

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this canonical status is assigned are treated both as having a fixed meaning embodied in them and also as always open to rereading, so that every tradition becomes to some degree a tradition of critical reinterpretation in which one and the same body of texts, with of course some addition and subtraction, is put to the question, and to successively different sets of questions, as a tradition unfolds.

(MacIntyre, 1988, p. 383)

17

A tradition of enquiry is more than a coherent movement of thought. It is such a movement in the course of which those engaging in that movement become aware of it and of its direction and in self-aware fashion attempt to engage in its debates and carry its enquiries forward.

(MacIntyre, 1988, p. 326)

18 MacIntyre, for example, while professing to be an Aristotelian, rejects Aristotle's "flawed metaphysical biology" as a source of a human *telos* (MacIntyre, 1981, p. 152) and has attempted to offer a replacement for it, via his own notion of the role of virtues in practices.

19 See, for example, p. 11 of *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, where MacIntyre notes that Islam and Judaism are examples of traditions which he has not covered in his work.

20 See also Bell (1994) for more on this point.

21 Michael Walzer, for example, acknowledges that there might be some sort of "universal moral code" (in *Interpretation and Social Criticism* (a book published four years after the better known *Spheres of Justice*), p. 24), but that if so it would be very minimal, as Mulhall and Swift point out:

[s]ince such a minimal code derives its validity from the fact that it arises or is discovered universally, societies that fail to respect it must necessarily be rare exceptions.

(Mulhall and Swift, 1992, p. 144)

Alasdair MacIntyre, an avowed Aristotelian, agrees with Aristotle that "the basic law of logic, the law of noncontradiction" has universal applicability. But logic is only a small part of rationality:

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. . . even if Aristotle was successful, and I believe that he was, in showing that no one who understands the laws of logic can remain rational while rejecting them, observance of the laws of logic is only a necessary and not a sufficient condition for rationality, whether theoretical or practical. It is on what has to be added to observance of the laws of logic to justify ascriptions of rationality -- whether to oneself or to others, whether to modes of enquiry or to justifications of belief, or to courses of action and their justification -- that disagreement arises concerning the fundamental nature of rationality and extends into disagreement over how it is rationally appropriate to proceed in the face of these disagreements. So the resources provided by modern academic philosophy enable us to redefine, but do not themselves seem to resolve the problems of those confronting the rival claims upon their allegiance that are made by protagonists of conflicting accounts of justice and of practical rationality.

(MacIntyre, 1988, p. 4)

22 In his article, "The Idea of a Communitarian Morality", Philip Selznick argues for example that communal values reflect "objective reason" rather than the "subjective reasoning" that liberalism generates (Selznick, 1987, p. 457).

23 Taylor notes that Allan Bloom's bestselling *The Closing of the American Mind* emphasizes this point.

24 Romans 6:23.

25 This is in some ways analogous to the situation seen fairly frequently in electoral politics in which the popularity of a suddenly leaderless political party surges past that of other parties with actual leaders at the helm. During its period of leaderlessness, a party's potential supporters can each imagine their ideal candidate at its head, although ultimately only one man or woman can fill that position when election day rolls around. Similarly, in order to make a convincing claim for a real institutionalization, communitarian alternatives must eventually be made specific enough to undergo a real scrutiny.

Chapter Two: Alasdair MacIntyre: Tradition and the Foundations of Authority

Communitarians believe that the malaise that they perceive in modern life can be allayed only by our embracing a common, central, authoritative system of morality -- a "shared moral horizon". Alasdair MacIntyre's idea of a tradition represents the most well-articulated version of this communitarian ideal. His recommendation that we form "local communities" built around such shared horizons is the clearest indicator of the way we might realize the communitarian vision, and his citation of moral communities like Aristotelian Athens as his ideal provides us with the most testable examples of how a society hewing to his vision might get on.

Before proceeding to look more deeply at MacIntyre's philosophy, it is important to emphasize that he is not arguing for the potential of every "tradition" to provide an authoritative moral horizon. He is in fact arguing that such potential lies only in specific sorts of traditions expressed in specific sorts of moral *communities*. MacIntyre envisions life in this sort of community as being informed by a single tradition encompassing all aspects of social existence, providing for the inhabitants of the community a mode of rational enquiry within which they can engage in moral deliberation and discourse, a *telos* defining the higher ends of their lives, guidelines and justifications for their community's social structure and institutions, and a system of morality. MacIntyre's idea of a tradition clearly differs from the general understanding of that concept.

We cannot, for example, sweepingly state that MacIntyre is urging upon us "Christianity" or "Aristoteleanism" or any other tradition so broadly delineated, for not all forms or practices of Christianity or Aristoteleanism are as all-embracing as MacIntyre's conception of a tradition would require them to be. His proposals presuppose a much more highly-developed and more self-contained form of tradition-bearing community than less specific

understandings of the idea of a tradition contemplate. The kind of life and social system MacIntyre has in mind when he speaks of traditional communities is more that of mediaeval Christianity than, say, apostolic-era Christianity. The former was expressed in a state-connected, defined and hierarchical social system embodied in a unitraditional community, while the latter represented a small sect with little political authority or capacity to establish its own institutions as it tried to survive under the thumb of the Roman Empire. When MacIntyre discusses the great Christian traditions, he speaks of Augustine's and Aquinas' rather than of Christ's or Peter's.

In a similar way, I understand MacIntyre to be advocating the kind of life offered by *Athenian* Aristoteleanism rather than by a more academic Aristoteleanism. The former was, again, expressed in a highly-elaborated, integrated, authoritative social structure, while the latter has not even really ever been a "community" in any sense. MacIntyre himself notes that one cannot be Aristotelian in the sense in which he is referring without living in a world in which the Aristotelian schema has a place.¹

In both these examples, the less elaborated version of the tradition in question might be understood as comfortably existing within a liberal society. This is how most moderns understand traditions,² and this is why they see them as having a weaker, more supplementary role in human life than that envisioned by MacIntyre. But it is the understanding of traditions as having their most appropriate embodiment in their greater, more authoritative, more all-encompassing expressions that gives point to MacIntyre's rejection of liberalism and modernity. MacIntyre is not suggesting that we give our adherence to a great tradition in the sense of joining a club, celebrating Christmas at the shopping mall, or writing about the Aristotelian virtues for academic journals. He is advocating, rather, the construction of local forms of

community with comprehensive moral schemes in which a great tradition is the definitive source of inspiration, guidance, and social authority.

MacIntyre's ideal communities are unitraditional societies³ denying both place and legitimacy to the alternative truths of other traditions.⁴ When I speak below of traditions, then, I mean MacIntyre-type traditions as they are expressed in the unitraditional communities he is recommending to us.

It is clear that the idea of a tradition as expressed in MacIntyre's work has much to recommend it, appearing as it does to provide a coherent and illuminating description of the connection between philosophy and society. The authoritative social ordering, *telos*, and moral code provided by the great traditions in their historic and prospective local communities (i. e., those advocated by MacIntyre) has a great deal of initial appeal, especially for those who believe the modern era to be lacking in moral values.

But while much of what MacIntyre has to say is initially appealing, there is apparent a certain tension within his philosophy between two of its core notions. On the one hand, MacIntyre argues that there is no universal truth, no ultimate source of moral wisdom in our world. Yet on the other hand, he argues for the legitimacy of the moral authority of the great traditions in their local contexts, and advocates our own construction of similarly tradition-driven local communities in our world of today. But what is the basis for the authority and legitimacy MacIntyre attributes to the great traditions if their moral truths are not derived from some source of actual truth? How can he argue that the *telos*, social structure, and morality of a community as prescribed by its great tradition are true and therefore legitimate and authoritative if the tradition upon which these "truths" are based is not itself a reflection of an ultimate truth? And from what would derive the moral authority of a given tradition in such "local forms of community" if we were

to heed MacIntyre's call and resurrect such forms in our contemporary circumstances? In short, if traditions are not expressions of actual truth, then how is it that they come to be established and what is it about them that merits their legitimacy in MacIntyre's philosophy? It is this question which will be the central concern of the examination and elaboration of MacIntyre's theory offered in this chapter.

MacIntyre's own answer to this question comes in his description of the process of evolutionary development through which traditions move. This is a three stage process not unlike the Hegelian dialectic of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis.⁵ The first stage of this process is the establishment of a tradition; the second, the beginning of systematic questioning and debate around that tradition; and the third, the reformulation of the tradition consequent on the results of that debate. The tradition-elaboration process repeats through stages two and three over time in a constant process of evolving change.

But what specifically does MacIntyre say about stage one, the process of establishment of a tradition with which we are concerned here? Very little it would seem. He notes that

[t]he rationality of a tradition-constituted and tradition-constitutive enquiry is in key and essential part a matter of the kind of progress which it makes through a number of well-defined stages. Every . . . form of enquiry begins in and from some condition of pure historical contingency, from the beliefs, institutions, and practices of some particular community which constitute a given. Within such a community authority will have been conferred upon certain texts and certain voices. Bards, priests, prophets, kings, and, on occasion, fools and jesters will all be heard.

(MacIntyre, 1988, p. 354)

The question of whether MacIntyre has fully elaborated a rational foundation for his theory draws us here to the phrase "authority will have been

conferred". It is necessary to ask what is hidden in this passive construction, for how such authority comes to be is precisely the question that MacIntyre's philosophy must answer if it is to overcome its most serious internal conflict.

What then, does MacIntyre mean when he says "authority will have been conferred"? Is he suggesting that traditions are authoritative because their inhabitants have *given* them authority, have consented to their reign? This is indeed a possible interpretation of MacIntyre's philosophy, but it is not, I would argue, a convincing one. We have a number of reasons to doubt that it is consent upon which the authority of MacIntyre-type traditions is founded.

In his very use of the passive construction "will have been conferred", MacIntyre fails to specify who is consenting or to specify how much consent is necessary to legitimize a unitraditional regime. Certainly, it cannot be argued, for example, that most Greek slaves consented to their subordination in the Athenian hierarchy, nor that Christian heretics or forced converts of the Middle Ages gave their allegiance to their society's ruling tradition. If consent lies at the source of traditional authority, then surely it must require the consent of these people too.

MacIntyre's use of the word "authority" in this context is also unspecific. Undoubtedly, many inhabitants of traditional societies give their allegiance to and thereby confer authority upon certain of their community's canonical texts, upon its bards, priests, prophets, kings, and so on. But how much authority does this imply? As will be seen later in this chapter, the authority exercised by MacIntyre-type traditions in their unitraditional communities goes far beyond the mere offerings of wisdom and guidance by moral leaders implied here by MacIntyre. In such societies, all aspects of life are governed by the reigning tradition. Can it viably be argued that the authority a society's inhabitants confer upon their moral leaders in respect for their guidance is great enough to legitimize that extensive an influence?

We also have little reason to imagine that even MacIntyre himself is implying that consent underlies traditions in the societies he is advocating. If he believes that consent is necessary to traditional authority, we might ask, then would not MacIntyre's ideal society be one in which choice was available to inhabitants, in which they could choose from amongst the great traditions the one to which they most preferred to give their allegiance? But as we have seen, MacIntyre (like all communitarians) rejects the most viable system in which that kind of choice is available -- liberalism. Not for him is liberalism's "tolerance of different rationalities in different milieus" (MacIntyre, 1988, p. 397) or its inability to "secur[e] moral agreement" (MacIntyre, 1981, p. 6). It is in fact these very features of liberalism which prompt him advocate constructing untraditional local forms of community, forms in which real choice is not available.

Furthermore, MacIntyre does not assert that untraditional societies arise through the consent of those governed by them, but rather, through "pure historical contingency". That traditions are 'historically contingent' implies not choice, but chance as the background to their authority. For it should not be assumed that merely because a untraditional regime exists it has the consent of its inhabitants. Did the U.S.S.R. of 1980 have significantly more popular support than the U.S.S.R. of 1990 in the days before its fall? Likely not.

Perhaps most telling of MacIntyre's unconcern for the issue of consent is the fact that none of the ideal societies he commends to us based their own authority upon their inhabitants' consent. Aristotelian Athens, for example, found the authority of its regime in Aristotle's "metaphysical biology" according to MacIntyre (1981, p. 152), not in the consent of its members. And mediaeval Christianity's authority was argued to come not from consent, but from "God's will". MacIntyre's ideal societies do not see themselves as

depending upon the consent of their inhabitants.

For these reasons, it is difficult to interpret MacIntyre's phrase "authority will have been conferred" as implying consent. This is not to say that great traditions enjoy *no* consensually-granted authority. It is certainly reasonable to suggest that in their earliest formulations -- that is, before they become connected to a regime of state power (Christ's Christianity, for example) -- the great traditions attract voluntary adherents. It is even reasonable to suggest that in their later MacIntyre-type guises (that is, connected to the state in a unitrational society governing all aspects of life) such traditions would have many supporters. What is arguable, though, is that consent of some number of a population to some degree of traditional authority is sufficient to rationally justify the all-encompassing, unitrational control of a great tradition in the types of communities MacIntyre is advocating. While such societies no doubt had the support of many of their inhabitants, the extent of that evident consent is not enough to legitimate the degree of traditional authority called for in MacIntyre's philosophy, nor the reach of that authority to all the inhabitants of such communities.

MacIntyre's bare statement that "authority will have been conferred" therefore leaves the impression that he has avoided rather than entered the debate on this issue. He asserts, for example, that the first principles of traditions as he describes them "are not self-sufficient, self-justifying epistemological principles" (MacIntyre, 1988, p. 360). The origin of such traditions is rather "the contingency and positivity of some set of established beliefs"⁶ which makes the rationality of traditions "inescapably anti-Cartesian" (MacIntyre, 1988, p. 360). Given his advocacy of the authority of traditions in their local contexts, MacIntyre's statement here is tantamount to saying that the authority of such traditions derives from the mere fact of their existence. If this is so, then we must assume that in MacIntyre's eyes the

moral authority of a tradition arises -- like George Mallory's motivation to climb Mount Everest -- "because it is there". But how is the mere existence of a traditional regime justification for the authority of its moral system? Is MacIntyre's opting out of the epistemological issue based on reasoned argument, or is he merely asserting his desire to avoid the problem? Has he said something to the effect of "we can discard the epistemological issue for this reason . . .", or has he in fact said, "I *choose* to discard the epistemological issue"? If the latter statement is supposed to stand as convincing to us, then MacIntyre's notion of "rationality" is one in which mere assertions stand as proofs. Such a conception is not likely to be convincing to those to whom MacIntyre has addressed his work; the thoughtful persons who have "not as yet . . . given their allegiance to some coherent tradition of enquiry" (MacIntyre, 1988, p. 393). Nor is it compatible with the allegiance MacIntyre professes to the standards of logic.⁷ MacIntyre has given us no compelling reasons to abandon our demand that his philosophical assertions have epistemological justification.

But not only is there no reason to discard the epistemological issue here, there is in fact good reason not to discard it. The history of legal analysis shows us that scholars began questioning positivist analyses of outcomes in courts of law for exactly the same reason that MacIntyre's theory falls into question here.⁸ Scholars began to wonder if perhaps the law had been viewed in positivist light by their predecessors not because legal outcomes were positivistically-grounded, but because their predecessors were themselves positivistically-oriented. And ensuing antipositivist analyses of jurisprudential reasoning examining more closely the origins and influences of judicial decision-making began to uncover possible explanations and conceptions of judicial outcomes alternative to the purely precedent-based

explanations that had previously been made. Richard Quinney, for example, argues that legal outcomes in American courts are based not on *stare decisis*, but in a desire to do what is necessary to preserve the economic power of the American upper class:

[t]he primary interest of the ruling class is to preserve the existing order and, in so doing, to protect its existential and material base. This is accomplished ultimately by means of the legal system. Any threats to the established order can be dealt with by invoking the final weapon of the ruling class, its legal system. Threats to American economic security abroad are dealt with militarily. . .

Similarly, the criminal law is used at home to maintain domestic order. Ruling class interests are secured by preventing any challenge to the moral and economic structure. In other words, the military abroad and law enforcement at home are two sides of the same phenomenon: the preservation of the interests of the ruling class. The weapons of control are in the hands of that class, and its response to any challenge is force and destruction. The weapons of crime control, as well as the idea and practice of law itself, are dominated by the ruling class. A stable capitalist order is in its interest.

(Quinney, 1973, pp. 54 - 5)

The point here is not that Quinney's view of the American legal system is necessarily correct, but that his antipositivism sheds new light on aspects of the legal system which positivist analyses had ignored. And Quinney's view is just one of a flood of alternative conceptions unleashed by the breaking of the positivist dam in legal analysis. Antipositivist assessments of the law have brought new understandings of the source of legal "truths": might it not be the case that such an assessment could bring a new understanding of the truths of traditions of the type MacIntyre is advocating?⁹

The analogy between MacIntyre's positivist understanding of the establishment of traditions and classical legal analysts' understanding of the law is of particular interest to us here because MacIntyre's notion of "rational

traditions” has two important parallels with positivist understandings of the common law. Both conceive of an overarching, authoritative system as embodying and expressing the wisdom of society. In MacIntyre’s philosophy, traditions are such an embodiment; in the legal system, the jurisprudence of the common law plays that role. And both MacIntyre’s analysis and those of classical legal scholars envision the systems with which they are concerned as generating moral outputs through an ongoing, evolutionary process of debate. In MacIntyre’s philosophy, this process occurs via debate within traditions; in the legal system, via the application, elaboration, expansion, and clarification of precedents in legal cases over time. Both MacIntyre’s work and classical legal analysis are premised on the idea that the moral truths with which they are concerned have been generated via a *rational* process. Given these similarities, the uncovering by antipositivist legal analyses of often surprising alternative understandings of the law previously concealed by the veil of positivism might therefore make us wonder if an antipositivist look at MacIntyre-type traditions might uncover equally unexpected possible understandings there.

Unfortunately, MacIntyre’s positivist understanding of the origin of traditions forbids him from considering how the traditions he advocates came into their unitary moral authority, and much of his analytical energy in *Whose Justice, Which Rationality?* and *After Virtue* is expended in tracing the development rather than the origins of such traditions. But the issue of the origin and establishment of MacIntyre-type traditions is a crucial one in analyzing MacIntyre’s thought because so much that follows in the communities he envisions is determined at the founding of their traditions. MacIntyre notes, for example, that:

. . . theories of justice and practical rationality confront us as aspects of traditions, allegiance to which requires the living out of some more or less

systematically embodied form of human life, each with its own specific modes of social relationship, each with its own canons of interpretation and explanation in respect of the behaviour of others, each with its own evaluative practices.

(MacIntyre, 1988, p. 391)

In this view, then, much of what we consider to be important in human life is seen as being governed by a community's founding tradition. Even more importantly, the very fact that traditions establish their communities' modes of rational enquiry means that what they initially establish governs and limits how their authority will be later challenged. The significance of what is initially established therefore has ramifications throughout a tradition's lifespan.

The bare assertion that "authority will have been conferred" that MacIntyre offers as justification for the legitimacy and authority he attributes to the great traditions in their local contexts is an unsatisfactory foundation upon which to erect systems of such influence. Given the lack of elaboration MacIntyre himself offers on this issue, it becomes necessary at this point to take a more constructivist approach in trying to find some deeper rational roots for the authority he attributes to traditional communities. Can such roots be construed from what he has offered us?

We have to this point seen that traditions of the type MacIntyre advocates are not based on the consent of those living under them, not self-generating (in the Cartesian sense), nor derived from an ultimate universal truth. There are at least two other possible sources of epistemological justification which we might attempt to impute to MacIntyre's theory to fill its unacceptable positivist void. The first of these is MacIntyre's own assertion that traditions are self-justifying. That is, the principles by which the legitimacy of a tradition's reign are determined are principles *established by the tradition itself*. MacIntyre makes this point a number of times. For

example, he notes that

. . . there is no other way to engage in the formulation, elaboration, rational justification, and criticism of accounts of practical rationality and justice except from within some one particular tradition . . .

(MacIntyre, 1988, p . 350)

And that

[e]ach tradition can at each stage of its development provide rational justification for its central theses in its own terms, employing the concepts and standards by which it defines itself, but there is no set of independent standards of rational justification.

(MacIntyre, 1988, p . 351)

And, in speaking of epistemological first principles, he notes that such principles

. . . are justified insofar as in the history of this tradition they have, by surviving the process of dialectical questioning, vindicated themselves as superior to their historical predecessors.

(MacIntyre, 1988, p . 360)

Each of these statements envisions the justification of the establishing principles of a tradition as coming *after* that establishment. In MacIntyre's philosophy, the principles by which a tradition is determined to be authoritative are in fact principles established by the tradition's coming into being. We are told that justification of a tradition comes from "within" the particular tradition; that rational justification for the central theses of a tradition is "in its own terms"; and that justification for the precepts of a tradition lies in their having survived the intratraditional "process of dialectical questioning". Each of these statements addresses stages two or three of the process of tradition development MacIntyre has described rather

than the stage one issues with which we are concerned here. None of these statements are explanations for how a tradition initially comes into its authority or from what source such authority might legitimately arise.

The self-justificatory process for traditions in this view is therefore little more than “preaching to the choir”; MacIntyre holds that such justifications must be convincing to those already converted, but need not be to anyone else. He acknowledges as much:

[t]hey [epistemological first principles] may indeed be regarded as both necessary and evident, but their necessity and their evidentness will be characterizable as such only to and by those whose thought is framed by the kind of conceptual scheme from which they emerge as a key element, in the formulation and reformulation of the theories informed by that historically developing conceptual scheme.

(MacIntyre, 1988, p. 360)

In MacIntyre’s own view, then, the epistemological first principles of a given tradition will be evident only to those whose thinking is *already* framed by such principles. The logic of justification here is undeniably circular. And while that circularity might be appropriate as a description of or prescription for debate within an existing tradition, it is not appropriate as an explanation of how such traditions come to authority in the first place. Relying on the idea that traditions can self-justify their establishing principles leads us no further than does the idea that “authority will have been conferred”.

A second possible source for the authority MacIntyre imputes to founding traditions might perhaps be found in what is often called the “social matrix”. This is a rather common idea in communitarian philosophy, appearing in various forms in the works of all the early communitarians (Mulhall and Swift, 1992, p. 13). The idea of the social matrix has it that individuals are not “prior to society”, but that they are products of the society

in which they live. Mulhall and Swift point out that communitarians “insist on recognition of the necessarily social or communal *origins* of the individual’s self-understanding and conception of how she should lead her life” (Mulhall and Swift, 1992, p. 15). Furthermore, most communitarians make the

. . . sociological-cum-philosophical point that people necessarily derive their self-understandings and conceptions of the good from the social matrix. Whether this is put as a quasi-empirical claim about socialization processes, or as a conceptual claim about the impossibility of language, thought, or moral life outside a social setting -- and it is these philosophical themes that communitarian theorists have given particular attention -- the emphasis here is on . . . the way in which the individual is parasitic on society for the very way that she thinks, including the way that she thinks of herself as an individual.

(Mulhall and Swift, 1992, p. 15)

In this view, there is seen to be a deep and natural accord between the community and the individuals that live within it. The community’s morality, social structure, and concept of rationality (its great tradition to use MacIntyre’s nomenclature) are not constructs imposed upon more or less willing individuals, but, more deeply, both the formative influences upon what individuals are and wish to be, and through that influence then, expressions by individuals in community of their own personalities (through their ways of thinking, their beliefs and actions, and the institutions, practices, and social structures they as a consequence create). We might therefore imagine traditions as having as the source of their “truths” the preexistent truths of the society in which they arise.

Although he does not use the term “social matrix”, this idea is indeed present in MacIntyre’s work. The symbiotic relationship in which traditions influence individuals in community whose actions and social constructions in turn express and sustain the tradition of their community is an important part

of his philosophy. MacIntyre notes, for example, that traditions are expressions of community life:

. . . tradition-constituted and tradition-constitutive enquiry . . . [has] a history neither distinct from, nor intelligible apart from, the history of certain forms of social and practical life, nor are mere independent variables. Philosophical theories give organized expression to concepts and theories *already embodied in forms of practice and types of community*.
(MacIntyre, 1988, p . 390, emphasis added)

Such concepts and theories are expressed in and derived “from the beliefs, institutions and practices of [their own] . . . particular community”
(MacIntyre, 1988, p. 354).

Language is one example of a mechanism by which the tradition of a community is expressed. MacIntyre explains that

. . . language . . . is used in and by a particular community living at a particular time and place with particular shared beliefs, institutions, and practices. These beliefs, institutions, and practices will be furnished expression and embodiment in a variety of linguistic expressions . . . the use of which will presuppose commitment to those same beliefs, institutions, and practices. . . . Limits to the possibilities of speaking other than in accordance with the dominant beliefs of such communities are set by the language-in-use of those communities . . .
(MacIntyre, 1988, p . 373)

It is in this example that we see how the social matrix might be seen as perhaps providing a viable explanation and justification of how MacIntyre-type traditions come to be conferred with their authority. If traditions come to being through such natural and unconscious phenomena as the very language that people use, it might be argued that their authority arises initially in an organic, developmental process not unlike that which MacIntyre sees as characterizing the process of change in traditions once

they have been fully established.

In such a view, a society might be imagined to find authoritative, for example, the precepts “x”, “y”, and “z” in its founding tradition because x, y, and z represent embodiments of formative truths expressing the very essence of the community. This kind of explanation would represent something on the order of an anthropological observation about the human species in which the development of traditions could be thought of as being some kind of natural phenomenon.

But if we are to imagine traditions as arising from their communities’ social matrices, it must be the case that such traditions correspond to the social matrices that spawned them. That is, a community’s precepts of truth should be evident in its tradition, and each precept, belief, and so on expressed in the community’s great tradition should be capable of being traced back to a truth embodied in the social matrix that spawned it. We would not, for example, expect a tradition generated by the x, y, z social matrix hypothesized above to express only the precepts x and y while excluding z, or to express the truths x, y, z, *and* w. Dissimilarities between the “truths” of the social matrix and the great tradition of a community would imply that something other than the social matrix had had a hand in determining the truths of the community’s reigning tradition. The greater the extent of such dissimilarities, the more evident would it be that the community’s great tradition was in reality an artifact, and the less convincing therefore would be attempts to find the source of its authority in something like the social matrix.

It is for this reason that traditions as MacIntyre describes them cannot reasonably be argued to be products of their social matrices. For the truths of MacIntyre-type traditions are not accurate reflections of the beliefs, practices, and institutions -- the components of MacIntyre’s version of the social matrix -- that exist in their founding societies. MacIntyre argues on behalf of

traditions for their ability to prioritize the practices of their communities and to provide for their members *telos* generative of a clear social morality:

. . . without an overriding conception of the *telos* of a whole human life, conceived as a unity, our conception of certain individual virtues has to remain partial and incomplete.

(MacIntyre, 1981, p. 188)

This provision of a clear, certain, non-individually-based morality upon which the members of a society can base their moral choices is in fact one of the main reasons MacIntyre finds the notion of tradition-based truths so compelling. But implicit in his arguments for the necessity of traditions to *telos* is the notion that the beliefs, practices, and institutions of a community do not *themselves* constitute a tradition. These beliefs, practices, and institutions are unorganized, unprioritized, and often conflicting. A tradition, on the other hand, provides an overarching scheme of organization, prioritization, and conflict resolution that transcends that existent in the social matrix:

. . . the goods internal to practices including the goods internal to the practice of making and sustaining forms of community, need to be ordered and evaluated in some way if we are to assess relative desert. Thus . . . substantive application of an Aristotelian concept of justice [for example] requires an understanding of goods and of the good that goes beyond the multiplicity of goods which inform practices.

(MacIntyre, 1981, p. 188)

Thus, the scheme of organization, prioritization, and conflict resolution offered by a tradition in a MacIntyre-type unitraditional society is an element superadded to and imposed atop the conflicting possibilities inherent in the social “truths” that make up a given community’s social matrix. It cannot as a result be imagined as being itself a pure product of that social matrix.¹⁰

Of course, those advocating MacIntyre's view might argue that he does in fact take such conflicting possibilities into account in describing traditions as being ongoing subjects of debate between those who hold rival views of what the tradition should define as the good. MacIntyre-type traditions would in this view be argued to be sufficiently broad to be capable of containing within themselves the range of positions on moral issues that would be expressed within a given society. This view, however, does not take into account the authority with which MacIntyre invests traditions in the types of communities he describes and advocates. Conflicts over the priority and valuation of beliefs, practices, and institutions in such societies are not debates in which all truths and all debaters at least gain admission to the arena of debate; intratraditional debates are limited by the existing parameters of the tradition itself. Some "truths" are excluded *a priori*. In the mediaeval Christian tradition, for example, neither the reality nor the divinity of Christ were subject to question. Traditions also on occasion exclude certain individuals or groups from debates, thus excluding the potentially alternative "truths" these people might have to offer. In classical Greek societies of the Aristotelian type, for example, only citizens (free born male heads of household) were allowed to participate in any significant way in their society's rational debates. These exclusions mean that even MacIntyre-type traditions broadly imagined as incorporating a great deal of debate and enquiry cannot be seen as one-to-one expressions of the beliefs, practices, and institutions which existed in their societies prior to their coming into being.

Ultimately, then, traditions of the type MacIntyre advocates are not contiguous or synonymous with their societies' social matrices. In coming into being or acquiring authority, such traditions both add to (in their new prioritizations) and take away from (in their reduction and limitation of the arena of debate) the "truths" manifested in the social matrix that might

otherwise be interpreted as having spawned them. Such traditions cannot plausibly be argued to have just “arisen” from the social matrix, for they represent a radical discontinuity with the unordered collection of beliefs, practices, and institutions in their pretraditional social antecedents. The social matrix cannot therefore be the source of authority which MacIntyre finds in the traditions of the type he advocates.

Our review of possible bases for the authority given to the great traditions in MacIntyre’s political thought has not resulted in discovering a viable rational justification. The authority of MacIntyre-type traditions has been found not to be self-generating (by MacIntyre’s own assertion), based on the consent of those living under them, logically capable of self-justification after the fact of their establishment, or derivable from the “social matrix” of which many communitarians speak. Nor can such traditions be justified as being expressions or representations of some more universal truth (as each of them would themselves claim), for in MacIntyre’s theory there is no such thing. What then is at the root of the authority which MacIntyre attributes to traditions of the type to which he asks us to give our allegiance? If such authority cannot be seen as having been “conferred”, derived from some universal truth or truths, as being self-justifiable, self- or socially- generated, what then are we left with?

I would argue that a deeper analysis of MacIntyre’s philosophy reveals a source for the authority of traditions which MacIntyre’s work nowhere considers: power. Just as Richard Quinney’s antipositivist analysis of the American legal system revealed a significant role for economic power as a decider of judicial outcomes, so too does an antipositivist analysis of MacIntyre-type traditions reveal a role for various types of power in assisting in their establishment, elaboration, and maintenance. The authority of such traditions in the unitraditional societies that MacIntyre celebrates is not

entirely naturally arising, but is aided by power.

None of this is to suggest that MacIntyre has *intentionally* built his system of thought around the notion of power as the source of truth; in fact, the next chapter of this work is devoted to describing how the role that power plays in MacIntyre's concept of a tradition contravenes other MacIntyrean values. It may be that MacIntyre's positivist approach has denied him the ability to see this possibility. I intend to suggest, however, that the only *feasible* foundation upon which such traditions could find the authority of the type and degree MacIntyre attributes to them is power. This role for power in MacIntyre-type traditions is evident both conceptually, in MacIntyre's theory of traditions, and empirically, in actual examples of traditional societies conforming to MacIntyre's model.

At the conceptual level, the outlines of a power-dependent foundation for MacIntyre's philosophy can be seen in his conception of the role of a great tradition in the type of community he advocates. In this setting, a great tradition is all-embracing, bearer of a *telos* providing an authoritative prioritization and valuation of its community's mores (as expressed in its community's beliefs, institutions, and practices), and contiguous with its community's mechanisms and manifestations of power. Each of these characteristics evidences the role power implicitly plays in MacIntyre's philosophy.

The all-embracing nature of a community's great tradition is made apparent in two important ways in MacIntyre's work. First, in the types of societies he describes from the past and advocates for the future, MacIntyre applauds unitraditionality. In these communities, a *single* great tradition is seen as being the source of social organization, rational enquiry, and morality. But humanity is diverse, and so too are its potential moral influences. The monopolization by a single tradition of the moral territory of a community

seems therefore to be a somewhat unnatural development, one implying perhaps a role for power in establishing such monolithicity. Secondly, in societies of the type MacIntyre recommends, the influence of the community's dominant tradition is seen as extending to all aspects of human life. Such a broad reach provides numerous opportunities for the exercise of power by a tradition's designated authorities in preserving their reigning tradition's dominance, while providing little in the way of counterbalances that would prevent such exercises.

The unitraditionality of MacIntyre-type communities can be seen in a number of MacIntyre's discussions. In discussing, for example, the point at which "authority will have been conferred upon certain texts and certain voices" in the history of a "tradition-constituted and tradition-constitutive enquiry" (MacIntyre, 1988, p. 354), he speaks of such newly developing traditions as being contiguous and synonymous with "some particular community" (MacIntyre, 1988, p. 354). Neither's existence is envisioned as extending beyond the other's range. Similarly, in discussing the "translatability" of traditions, MacIntyre speaks interchangeably of a community's language and its tradition (MacIntyre, 1988, p. 373). If speaking the language makes one an adherent of the tradition that goes with that language, then clearly a unilingual community can only be thought of as having a single tradition. Perhaps most importantly, MacIntyre's advocacy of unitraditionality is evidenced in his criticisms of modern liberal society's inability to provide a coherent foundation for moral argument.¹¹ The multiplicity of possible traditions existent in liberal societies is anathema to MacIntyre, a fact brought out in his advocacy of the construction of "local forms of community" within which we can live through "the new dark ages which are already upon us" (MacIntyre, 1981, p. 245). Each of these examples points to the desire for unitraditionality which underlies MacIntyre's social

prescriptions.¹²

But not only is the dominant tradition in a MacIntyre-type community all-embracing in being the only significant tradition in that community, it is also all-embracing in the deep influence it exercises over virtually all aspects of the life of the community within which it reigns. This is again brought out by MacIntyre in a contrast he draws between the classical societies he prefers and the modern society he condemns. MacIntyre criticizes modern, liberal societies for their “compartmentalization” of life:

. . . the liberal is committed to there being no one overriding good. The recognition of a range of goods is accompanied by a recognition of a range of compartmentalized spheres within each of which some good is pursued: political, economic, familial, artistic, athletic, scientific. The liberal norm is characteristically, therefore, one according to which different kinds of evaluation, each independent of the other, are exercised in those different types of social environment. The heterogeneity is such that no overall ordering of goods is possible.

(MacIntyre, 1988, p. 337)

And, following from this, MacIntyre disapproves of modern-day selves who show “a tolerance of different rationalities in different milieus” (MacIntyre, 1988, p. 397). Clearly, he envisions most if not all aspects of human life in his ideal community as falling within the reigning tradition’s governance. MacIntyre’s theory conceives of no alternative way of being for inhabitants of such a society; no church, university, governmental or family structure expressive of an alternative tradition’s conceptions of the world to which members of the society could turn in their own lives.¹³ The reigning tradition in MacIntyre’s ideal community is both singular and all-encompassing in its influence.

Such a society would seem unlikely to arise in the first place without the

assistance of power, and would appear, once established, to provide an abundance of opportunities for the continued exercise of that power in aid of sustaining itself. Otherwise, how would there come to be only one tradition encompassing the multiplicity of human beliefs, practices and institutions within such a community, especially when we live in a world of many traditions? Might we not imagine that in such a unitraditional community there had been some application of power involved in “weeding the garden”? And such unitraditionality -- when coupled with the authority and far reach of MacIntyre-type traditions -- might also be cause for concern that the given tradition of a community could be *too* influential. The existence of a number of traditions in a society provides counterweights to the overextension of the authority of any single tradition. Societies that lack such counterweights are thus quite likely to be at risk of seeing the authority of their dominant tradition used to justify too much. Acton’s admonition might be remembered here.¹⁴ The all-embracing nature of a tradition in MacIntyre’s ideal society implies a large role for power in its establishment and sustenance.

The presence and application of power through a tradition in the types of communities MacIntyre advocates is also implied in his notion of traditions as being the bearers of their community’s *telos*. In this role, each tradition provides an authoritative prioritization and valuation of its community’s mores as they are expressed in the community’s beliefs, practices, and institutions. As our earlier arguments indicated, such a prioritization and valuation does not and cannot represent a one-to-one expression of a community’s beliefs, practices and institutions, for inherent in the very nature of a *telos* and a tradition are additions to and deletions from what is expressed in the “social matrix”. A prioritization and authoritative overarching system of belief has been added; the opportunity for alternative authoritative prioritizations has been removed. It might then be the case that

MacIntyre's notion of a tradition masks the possibility that such radical discontinuities are established, again, with the assistance of an exercise of power.

It is therefore unsurprising that we do find the kinds of connections to power for traditions that are implied in these sorts of characteristics. MacIntyre's traditions are indeed contiguous with their communities' mechanisms and manifestations of power. In such societies, the social structure and social roles of the community are both tradition-determined and tradition-sustaining. As MacIntyre notes:

[w]hat I hope this account makes clear already is the way in which any adequate account of the virtues in heroic society would be impossible which divorced them from their context in its social structure, just as no adequate account of the social structure of heroic society would be possible which did not include an account of the heroic virtues. But to put it this way is to understate the crucial point: morality and social structure are in fact one and the same in heroic society. There is only one set of social bonds. Morality as something distinct does not yet exist. Evaluative questions are questions of social fact. . . .

Nor are such questions difficult to answer, except in exceptional cases. For the given rules which assign men their place in the social order and with it their identity also prescribe what they owe and what is owed to them and how they are to be treated and regarded if they fail and how they are to treat and regard others if those others fail.

(MacIntyre, 1981, p. 116)

The hierarchical nature of the social structure implied herein (in which men are "assign[ed to] their place") and the attribution to that social structure of the powers inherent in prescribing how men "are to be treated and regarded if they fail" places in the community's reigning tradition and in the hands of its authorities and preservers capabilities of enforcement synonymous with a power-derived, not a naturally arising authority. The police and judicial

powers implied here indicate that traditions of this type are neither created nor preserved without the aid of power.

Some might argue that the sketch I have presented here is a too Orwellian, too nightmarish vision of the tradition-driven societies MacIntyre recommends. Those taking this stance might argue that the picture drawn above is one of Nazi jackboots arrogantly imposing arbitrary demands upon an unwilling society. It is, after all, the case that MacIntyre's notion of a tradition implies epistemological debate, "rational enquiry", and rational justification for moral assertions. Surely it can be argued that intellectual requirements like these deny the possibility of the uses and abuses of power suggested here. But it should not be forgotten that in communities of the type MacIntyre is advocating there are not only links between social structure and tradition, and between laws and tradition, but also links between *rational enquiry* and tradition. What is rational,¹⁵ who will debate,¹⁶ and what is undebatable¹⁷ are all determined in a society by its great tradition itself. In the societies MacIntyre advocates, there is a contiguity of the power of the social structure, the mechanisms of legal enforcement, and the capacity to define what is rational. As he notes:

[e]ach tradition can at each stage of its development provide rational justification for its central theses *in its own terms*, employing the concepts and standards by which it defines itself. . .

(MacIntyre, 1988, p. 351, emphasis added)

In such circumstances, one might imagine that it is as easily the case that reasons come to be adjusted to the requirements of the social structure as that the social structure comes to be adjusted to the requirements of reason.¹⁸ The intellectual elements of MacIntyre's traditions are therefore no safeguard against the use of power, for the reins of power and the reins of rational

justification lie in the same hands in societies governed by them.

It might also be argued that even if a tradition does have its foundations in power, its mores have to be “internalized” by those living under it in order to bring forth anything as significant as a great tradition. This would imply, then, that social matrix-style justifications of traditional authority would be possible despite my earlier arguments against them. But arguments for the internalization of traditional authority ignore the issue of *who* has internalized the tradition’s conceptions of rationality and morality. As will become more evident in the empirical analysis of MacIntyre-type societies offered below, that a community is living under a great tradition is no indication that all its inhabitants are its willing adherents.

We can see, then, that there is at the conceptual level of MacIntyre’s theory of a tradition a wide range of places in which power might be seen as at least potentially playing a role in helping to provide the authority he attributes to the great traditions in their local contexts. The all-embracing nature of such traditions -- evidenced in the unitraditionality of the societies built around them and in their influence on all aspects of the lives of the inhabitants of their communities -- implies a role for power in establishing that monolithicity and an opportunity for the further use of power in maintaining it because the authority of a tradition in such a context would be virtually unchecked. The fact that such traditions dictate a new *teleological* ordering of their societies’ diverse beliefs, practices, and institutions implies a role for power in establishing the authority of those *telos*. And the contiguity of the great traditions with their communities’ mechanisms and manifestations of power -- their communities’ social structures, social roles, and morality -- provides a confirmation of these intimations of power’s contributions to the authority attributed by MacIntyre to the great traditions.

Furthermore, MacIntyre himself appears on occasion to admit just such

a possibility. He notes, for example, that the

. . . coming together of two previously separate communities, each with its own well-established institutions, practices, and beliefs, either by migration or *by conquest*, may open up new alternative possibilities and require more than the existing means of evaluation are able to provide.

(MacIntyre, 1988, p. 355, emphasis added)

Inherent in the very notion of “conquest” is the coming into being of a new regime of power. When such a regime brings with it a MacIntyre-type untraditional community,¹⁹ then the new order which MacIntyre’s philosophy accords with legitimacy is not often likely to be other than power-derived.²⁰

This example is not intended to imply that the role for power in MacIntyre-type societies should be understood to be limited only to its most fully expressed level -- actual conquest. Not only does power have a wide range of applications in societies of the type MacIntyre applauds, it also takes numerous forms therein. The first and most obvious of these is of course the power of violence and outright coercion, which is implied not only in things like conquest, but also in the judicial and police powers tied to the great traditions in the sorts of societies MacIntyre delineates. But the notion of power need not only be understood as it is when it is said that “power comes from the barrel of a gun”. Power in MacIntyre’s ideal societies might reasonably be imagined to operate not only in the police force mode, but in subtler ways as well.

There is, for example, the power of the social structure, the arrangement of which is determined by a society’s great tradition. The moral requirements of a great tradition in a MacIntyre-type community are reinforced by their expression in all of the society’s institutions -- its

government, churches, places of learning, and the like. The ability of the authoritative elite in a traditional community to determine what is rationally- or morally-required comes as much from its ability to determine who will be a professor at the Academy²¹ (and thus what will be taught there) as it does from its ability to throw dissenters in prison. Since the institutions of rational enquiry in such societies lie in the hands of the authorities of the reigning tradition,²² they are in a position, as earlier noted, to determine what is rational, who will debate, and what is undebatable.

Another form of power in a MacIntyre-type community is that of prior existing authority. MacIntyre himself alludes to this sort of power when he asserts that in such communities “authority will have been conferred upon certain texts and certain voices” (MacIntyre, 1988, p. 354). To already have authority, then, is to be able to use that authority to further justify one’s position and the system which brought one into it. This type of power is manifest not only in people who hold authoritative positions in traditional societies, but in the canonical texts of such communities as well. The authority of such texts might be thought to arise as much from their canonicity (as, for example, when people reverently point out that “. . . the *Bible* says . . .”) as it does from their being enforced by the state. While these forms are subtle, they are nonetheless examples of the place that power has in the types of traditional communities MacIntyre envisions.

Evidence of such applications of power is certainly present in our own age in communities attempting to assert or maintain a unitraditional way of life. Executions of those opposed to the unification of church and state mandated by the *Sharia*²³ of fundamentalist Islamic nations like Iran, “ethnic cleansing” in Bosnia and Yugoslavia, the oppression of dissidents in formerly communist Russia, and China’s Tiananmen Square massacre are all examples of

the preservation or creation of untraditional authority by force. The greater the authority given in a community to an official *telos*, the greater the implication is that that authority was established with the help of power.

But empirical evidence for the role of power as the source of authority in untraditional societies is not limited to those of the current day. There is a great deal of such evidence to be found in explorations of the kinds of anciently-established traditional societies MacIntyre discusses in *After Virtue* and *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*. A brief examination of a number of traditions fitting the paradigm put forward in MacIntyre's philosophy -- the Christianity of the later days of the Roman Empire and of mediaeval times; the Aristoteleanism of ancient Athens; and the Aryanism of India -- will provide us with examples of the role that power can be seen to play in historical societies of the type MacIntyre celebrates.²⁴

Certainly Christianity in either its earliest association with the state, in the reign of Constantine the Great (r. 308 - 337), or in its second great flowering in the Middle Ages, under Charlemagne (Holy Roman Emperor 800 - 814), cannot be seen as a pure product of rational enquiry, epistemological crisis, or the social matrix. A number of major examples of power's role in assisting in the establishment and maintenance of the Christian regime in Europe can be drawn from these two eras.²⁵

Until Emperor Constantine's establishment of official tolerance for all religions in 313's Edict (or Constitution) of Milan, Christians were a persecuted minority in the Roman Empire. Almost immediately after his declaration of the Constitution, however, Constantine himself took up the Christian faith and began to "increasingly identif[y] the interests of the state with those of Christianity" (Bokenkotter, 1977, p. 50). The Emperor took as his personal symbol a cross "emblazoned with the monogram of Christ" (Bokenkotter, 1977,

p. 50) and attached this symbol to the standards of the army. And while Christianity was not to be declared the official religion of the Empire until 380, Constantine took the first steps on the road to establishing Rome's eventual unitradditionality, imposing various restrictions on pagan worship (Bokenkotter, 1977, p. 50).

But perhaps most indicative of the role power played in Christianity's first connection with the state is Constantine's handling of the first great Christian heresy -- Arianism.²⁶ The theological debate surrounding this issue pitted Arius of Alexandria and a number of bishops²⁷ who supported his interpretation of Christ's divinity against Arius' Archbishop, Alexander, and his supporters. Their dispute was the focus of the Council of Nicaea. The 318 bishops who attended the Council ultimately expressed their decision in the Nicene Creed, which rejected entirely the Arian understanding of Christ. Following the Nicene decision, further dissent was stilled by violence:

Arius . . . was . . . deposed and forbidden to return to Alexandria, where he still had many supporters. . . . Constantine ordered the burning of Arius' writings and immediately began to take repressive measures against his supporters. It was the Emperor, not the orthodox bishops, who ordered the repression of the Arian party, but the orthodox welcomed his action.
(Brown, 1984, p. 118)

Arianism was rejected and suppressed not thanks only to the deliberations of those engaged in a rational enquiry informed by Christian principles, but by the application of force as well.²⁸ Just a short decade after its adoption by Constantine, "[t]he mutual persecution of Christians by Christians, using the power of the state, had begun" (Brown, 1984, p. 118).

So too was Christianity's next great era begun with power's aid. Following the severe curtailment of its geographical scope and consequently

the reach of its spiritual authority during the Dark Ages, Christianity's European dominance was reasserted by Charlemagne in the late 700s. It is Charlemagne's conquest of the Saxons by force of arms which is generally marked as the beginning of the new and unified social order in Europe which historians refer to as "Christendom". Charlemagne's victory and his subsequent forced conversion of the Saxons to Christianity was marked and sanctioned by Pope Leo III, who on Christmas Day of the year 800 crowned Charlemagne as first Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire. Again, an application of force was central to this new establishment of Christian authority.

Further expansion and consolidation of Christendom was brought about beginning in the eleventh century by the Crusades, Christianity's most infamous application of power in pursuit of its spiritual goals. The Crusades were waged against Christianity's greatest external enemy, Islam, and were aimed at establishing the authority of the Christian realm in the Holy Land. Tens of thousands of Europeans and Arabs²⁹ were killed as both sides fought to gain and hold territory. Crusades were also directed during those years at Christianity's internal enemies -- pagans, apostates, and heretics -- with often fearsomely successful results. Simon Lloyd notes, for example, that "[t]he notorious Albigensian Crusade [directed against the Albigensian heretics in southern France] . . . destroyed . . . much of the cultural, social, and political life of Languedoc . . ." (Lloyd, 1995, p. 42).

Perhaps almost as emblematic as the Crusades of the role of power in establishing and maintaining Christian authority in the Middle Ages is the Inquisition. Used as a tool of enforcement of the faith, the Inquisition saw thousands tortured to death for heresy. It too is a sad example of the role that power rather than rational enquiry has played in settling some of Christianity's great intellectual and faith disputes.

We see, then, that power has pervaded Christianity in its unitraditional expressions. Power has been present at the establishment of Christian regimes, as in Constantine's restrictions on paganism and Charlemagne's forced conversion of the Saxons. It has been present during the course of the "rational" elaboration of Christian doctrine, as in its enforcement of the tenets of the Nicene Creed through the burning of Arius' books, and as in its resolution of the Albigensian heresy through the destruction of Languedoc. It has been present during Christendom's expansion, as in the Crusades against the Moslem-held Holy Land. And it has been present as an assistance to the maintenance of existing Christian authority, as in the Inquisition.

Given the pervasiveness of power's role within the Christian regimes of historical Europe, we would expect to find an abundance of examples of Christianity's canonical texts being used to justify these various applications of force, Christianity's dominance, and so on. It is of course difficult to find Christ advocating violence or worldly power, but those in the service of a tradition's regime can make the most of what is available to them. Saint Augustine's interpretation of Luke 14:23³⁰ as an endorsement of the use of force against heretics is an example of one such justification. The use of Deuteronomy's discussion of the penalties to be levied for idolatry (Deuteronomy 13)³¹ as the basis for the Crusades is another. The establishment and maintenance of the authority of the Christian tradition in historical Europe depended greatly not only on overt uses of power, but also on the subtler forms inherent in the canonical texts of Augustine and others. The unitraditionality of Christendom and the authority of the voices justifying its dominance cannot therefore be seen as having been achieved or "conferred" by the workings of divine Providence or the assistance of the Holy Spirit. Power was critical to Christianity's authoritative place in historical Europe.³²

While Christianity's long history offers much in the way of examples of the role of power in establishing and maintaining the authority of a great tradition, it is not unique in this regard. Athenian Aristoteleanism and Indian Aryanism also exemplify power's uses in this regard. Aristoteleanism is perhaps the tradition in which the "rational enquiry" MacIntyre speaks of receives its most elevated acclaim. Aristotelian teachings argue for and Athenian government was based upon the importance of thought and rational debate. As such, the Aristotelian tradition comes closest to representing MacIntyre's ideal, and it is Aristoteleanism to which MacIntyre professes his personal allegiance. But the rational thought, debate, and self-government glorified in Aristoteleanism were -- as it has become trite to point out -- limited to a very small portion of the Athenian population. The social role of slaves³³ in Aristotelian society, for example, was that of servants to the small, rationally-enquiring minority who were fortunate enough to be Athenian citizens. Slaves were for the most part not free acceptors of their status, and no record of changes in the Athenian institution of slavery coming about due to the "epistemological crises" of *slaves* over the justifiability of their servitude has been recorded by history. The social structure, laws, and social roles of Athens were all "facts" of that society's tradition. But all were in reality at least partially products of the power of the rationally-enquiring minority to impose that tradition upon others.

MacIntyre does not himself discuss India's historic Aryan caste system, but in many ways it can also be seen as paradigmatic of the type of societies he advocates. It featured its own *telos*-establishing religion (Hinduism), canonical texts (the *Vedas*), authorities and preservers (the *Brahman* caste), traditionally-determined social roles (the caste into which one was born determining one's occupation: lower castes were garbage and refuse collectors, for example), and a traditionally-determined social structure (upper

castes were socially dominant and privileged). True to MacIntyre's paradigm, the caste system was also a unifying, all-embracing governor of human life.³⁴

Also true to MacIntyre's paradigm is the role that power played in establishing the Aryan tradition. It is believed that circa 1500 Aryan tribes invaded the Indus Valley and there conquered its native peoples. Unsurprisingly, the conquerors "conferred authority" on themselves, placing themselves and their descendants at the very top of the social pyramid of castes they established. Their descendants made up the priestly (*i. e.*, "rationally-enquiring") *Brahman* caste and the warrior *Kshatriya* caste. Other peoples were relegated to the multiplicity of subordinate castes (such as the *Vaisya* (mercantile) and *Shudra* (worker) castes). Those of the lowest castes were known as the "Untouchables", with that title being a literal description of their status for upper caste Hindus. Again, justifications for the hierarchy of this society were found by its rationally-enquiring authorities -- members of castes like the *Brahmans* -- in canonical texts like the *Vedas*. The authority of these texts was established not solely in processes of rational debate or the like, but depended heavily on the swords of *Brahman* ancestors. The role for power in helping to establish and maintain unitraditional authority can be seen as much in Aryan society as it can in mediaeval Christianity or Athenian Aristoteleanism.

Of course, none of this is intended to imply that traditional regimes in these societies depended entirely on power for their authority or that they lacked any sort of popular support whatsoever. The successful imposition of unitraditionality upon a society is in fact likely to be preceded in most cases by the existence of a fair degree of uniformity within that society.³⁵ But, as I noted earlier, the uniformity imposed by a great tradition in one of MacIntyre's ideal communities goes far beyond that which could be imagined

to have already there existed. MacIntyre-type traditions are all-encompassing, extending their authority to all aspects of peoples' lives. They permit no significant alternatives to coexist, imposing themselves upon one hundred per cent of their subject population. They are hierarchical, establishing in every case upper and lower levels of membership in the community. And they limit the bounds of rational debate within their societies, thus governing change from above via their small elite, rather than from below through the general population. None of these features can be rationally legitimated merely by the existence of some quantity of popular support. The degree of authority called for by MacIntyre for a great tradition in its local context requires more justification than a limited popularity alone could provide.

It is for this reason that I argue that power is *fundamental* to such societies. Without its exercise, these kinds of communities would be so significantly different in their makeup and character as to no longer fit MacIntyre's paradigm. Even without Constantine's or Charlemagne's uses of force, no doubt most mediaeval Europeans would still have been Christians. But the society in which they practiced their Christianity would have been radically different. There would have been many Christian sects (a development not seriously to arise in Europe until the 1500s), more individualistic practices of that religion, a weaker Catholic Church, and a meaningful opportunity for inhabitants of Christendom to embrace and engage in non-Catholic "practices" -- atheism, Judaism, Arianism, Manicheanism, and so on. And while it might be too utopian to imagine that the Crusades would not have happened in such a situation, their justification in such a multitradeational society would likely have had to have emphasized to a greater extent military, territorial, and economic reasons for the invasion of the Holy Land rather arguments to spiritual values or religion. And in such a

situation -- in which the Catholic Church would have counted as one voice among many rather than as an all-authoritative, all-encompassing great tradition -- perhaps the Crusades would not have attracted as much popular support and participation as they did. A similar argument can be developed with respect to Aristotle's Athens. Without the play of power, it might be argued, the Athenian social system would have been much different; its underclasses would have had more freedom and equality, its upper classes, less leisure and authority. These are the possibilities ignored by the MacIntyrean philosophy of traditions. Alasdair MacIntyre has unduly romanticized the great untraditional societies of the past, and has forgotten the extent to which their authority was established and backed by coercion.

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So theories of justice and practical rationality confront us as aspects of traditions, allegiance to which requires the living out of some more or less systematically embodied form of human life, each with its own specific modes of social relationship, each with its own canons of interpretation and explanation in respect of the behaviour of others, each with its own evaluative practices.

(MacIntyre, 1988, p. 391)

2 As can be seen when, for example, contemporary Christians celebrate their saviour's day of birth primarily through their consumeristic indulgence in the free market purchase of gifts to go under the tree.

3 And let there be no mistake that MacIntyre is asserting the moral authority of traditions and asking us to give our allegiance to a single tradition. In MacIntyre's philosophy, traditions are crucial to ordering our priorities and helping us avoid the invasion of our moral lives by "a certain subversive arbitrariness" (MacIntyre, 1981, p. 189) evidenced when, for example, we show "tolerance of different rationalities in different milieus (MacIntyre, 1988, p. 397). Furthermore, for MacIntyre, the abandonment of socially- (*i. e.*, traditionally-) prescribed roles in our modern societies is, *a la* Emile Durkheim, "social pathology" (MacIntyre, 1988, p. 369). And he concludes *After Virtue* with an appeal to us to "construct" tradition-based "local forms of community" "within which civility and the intellectual and moral life can be sustained through the new dark ages which are clearly upon us" (MacIntyre, 1981, p. 245). These are all arguments requesting our allegiance to a singular authoritative tradition.

4 As MacIntyre notes,

. . . genuinely to adopt the standpoint of a tradition thereby commits one to its view of what is true and false and, in so committing one, prohibits one from adopting any rival standpoint. . . .
The multiplicity of traditions does not afford a multiplicity of perspectives among which we can move, but a multiplicity of antagonistic commitments, between which only conflict, rational or nonrational, is possible.

(MacIntyre, 1988, pp. 367 - 8)

5 MacIntyre denies that he is Hegelian, but that is only in regard to the Hegelian notion that there is a *telos* to history that man can apprehend in advance. In regard to MacIntyre's conception of the development of the traditions, it is difficult to imagine a more Hegelian pattern. MacIntyre himself uses the term "dialectical" to describe the process (MacIntyre, 1988, p. 360).

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6 I understand MacIntyre to be using the term “positivity” here as in its general meaning of analysis concerned with positive facts and phenomena excluding speculation upon ultimate causes or origins. MacIntyre is positivist in this sense in that he does not look to the ultimate origins of traditional authority.

7 See p. 4 of *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*

8 When I speak of positivism in the history of legal analysis, I am applying the more general definition of that term -- as it is understood in analyses of the rulings of law courts -- rather than the more technical definition as it is understood in legal *philosophy* (law is legitimate because it is enforced). For those engaged in analyses of the decisions of law courts, positivism is the understanding of legal decisions as being based on and governed solely by judicial application of precedents. Antipositivism in this field is based on the argument that legal analysts should look beyond these surface level interpretations of jurisprudence for other, deeper sources of judicial decision-making (a judge’s dislike of a plaintiff, enforcement of social rather than legal norms, protection of the social elite (see, for example, Richard Quinney’s discussion below in the text), and so on). When I note the parallels between positivist jurisprudential analysis and MacIntyre’s understanding of traditions, then, I am merely suggesting that both have ignored possible subsurface sources of their authority.

9 Quinney also makes the important point that positivism is an intellectual perspective favouring the status quo:

The political failure of positivist thought, as related to its intellectual failure, is to accept the status quo. There is no questioning of the established order, just as there is no examination of scientific assumptions. The official reality is the one with which the positivist operates -- and the one he accepts and supports.

(Quinney, 1973, pp. 3 -4)

10 We might clarify this even further by asking what it is that would have changed if one day a society’s practices included x, y, and z, while the next day its inhabitants were not permitted to practice z and had to practice w upon pain of authoritative punishment. In such circumstances, it is not the social matrix which has changed, but the *regime of authoritative punishment*. (Nor is this an artificial example. See the later discussion in this chapter of Constantine the Great’s conversion to Christianity for an example of overnight changes in permitted practices in emerging unitraditional societies.)

11 See, for example, his early discussions of emotivism in chapter two of *After Virtue*

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¹² There may be some unclarity on the issue of unitraditionality within MacIntyre's writings, especially as between the earlier *After Virtue* and the later *Whose Justice?*, but it can be seen even at times within *After Virtue* itself. As an example of the possibility of multitraditionality, in *After Virtue* we find MacIntyre at one point telling us that:

. . . the individual's search for his or her good is generally and characteristically conducted within a context defined by those *traditions* of which the individual's life is a part, and this is true both of those goods which are internal to practices and of the goods of a single life.
the history of each of our own lives is generally and characteristically embedded in and made intelligible in terms of the larger and longer histories of a *number of traditions*.

(MacIntyre, 1981, p. 207, emphasis added)

Yet this idea is notably absent in *Whose Justice?*. In refuting what he calls the "relativist challenge" to his work, MacIntyre argues that it cannot be the case that a person is outside of tradition or that he inhabits more than one tradition simultaneously. On the former, he says:

. . . it is an illusion to suppose that there is some neutral standing ground, some locus for rationality as such, which can afford rational resources sufficient for enquiry independent of all traditions. Those who have maintained otherwise either have covertly been adopting the standpoint of a tradition and deceiving themselves and perhaps others into supposing that theirs was just such a neutral standing ground or else have simply been in error.

(MacIntyre, 1988, p. 367)

And on the latter;

The multiplicity of traditions does not afford a multiplicity of perspectives among which we can move, but a multiplicity of antagonistic commitments, between which only conflict, rational or nonrational, is possible.

(MacIntyre, 1988, p. 368)

The unitraditionality of MacIntyre's philosophy is also evident in his

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discussion of how traditions come to be established. In speaking of that point at which "authority will have been conferred upon certain texts and certain voices" (MacIntyre, 1988, p. 354) in the history of "tradition-constituted and tradition-constitutive enquiry", MacIntyre makes this development contiguous and synonymous with that of "some particular community" (MacIntyre, 1988, p. 354). Furthermore, such premodern societies are lauded by MacIntyre for not being "compartmentalized" in the way of our modern society. Their inhabitants do not live separate religious, political, social, economic, and personal lives, but are part of one tradition-immersed way of life. This time in *After Virtue* itself, MacIntyre tells us:

[w]hat I hope this account makes clear already is the way in which any adequate account of the virtues in heroic society would be impossible which divorced them from their context in its social structure, just as no adequate account of the social structure of heroic society would be possible which did not include an account of the heroic virtues. But to put it this way is to understate the crucial point: morality and social structure are in fact one and the same in heroic society. There is only one set of social bonds. Morality as something distinct does not yet exist. Evaluative questions are questions of social fact.
(MacIntyre, 1981, p. 116)

The fact that there is "only one set of social bonds" (MacIntyre, 1981, p. 116) in the heroic societies MacIntyre advocates in *After Virtue* ultimately implies unitraditionality. No such singular set of social bonds would be possible in a community in which existed multiple authoritative traditions. Where the social structure is tradition-constituted and inseparable from morality there can clearly be only one morality. Ultimately, then, despite his at times contradictory views on this subject, MacIntyre's embrace and advocacy of unitraditionality in local communities is clear.

¹³ Of course, none of this is meant to imply that other traditions go completely unheard in a tradition-centred community. MacIntyre does after all suggest that those engaged in rational enquiry within traditions can "overhear" other traditions (MacIntyre, 1988, p. 350). But this rational enquiry and thus what is overheard and how it is perceived is itself governed by a society's dominant

When they [those engaged in rational enquiry] have understood the beliefs of the alien tradition, they may find themselves compelled to recognize that within this other tradition it is possible to construct from the concepts and theories peculiar to it what they were unable to provide from their own conceptual and theoretical resources, a cogent and illuminating

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explanation -- cogent and illuminating, that is, *by their own standards* -- of why their own intellectual tradition has been unable to solve its problems . . .
(MacIntyre, 1988, p. 364, emphasis added)

Furthermore, as will be seen later in this chapter, there are other characteristics of communities of the MacIntyre-type which tend to trivialize the influence of outside traditions on such societies. The preeminence of the influence and governance of the reigning tradition on the community's social structure, institutions (including those engaged in "rational enquiry" such as universities), and even laws all mitigate any significant impact outside traditions might be expected to have on life in a MacIntyre-style tradition-centred community.

14 "Power corrupts; absolute power corrupts absolutely".

15 As MacIntyre notes, "[e]ach [tradition] has its own standard of reasoning" (MacIntyre, 1988, p. 351).

16 As earlier noted, traditional societies often limit certain of their inhabitants' participation. The Aristotelian tradition, for example, excluded women and slaves from any significant participation in their society's debates.

17 In establishing, for example, what constitutes the "canonical texts" of the community's reigning tradition.

18 Nor is it necessary to imagine such adjustments as being based only in the malevolent self-interest of those fortunate enough to be in the reasoning class. Those in power quite often legitimately if misguidedly believe that the social structure so beneficial to them is in fact right of itself.

19 Later, MacIntyre also suggests that "mass conversion . . . might be the originating point for . . . a tradition" (MacIntyre, 1988, p. 357). Implicit even in a "mass conversion" is the possibility that a new tradition has had a power-based starting point. The "conversion" to Catholicism of South American civilizations by the Spaniards is an example of this possibility. It has historically been frequently the case that "conversion" and "conquest" are part and parcel of the same process.

20 It needs to be acknowledged that not always do the victors impose their own tradition upon the conquered. There are occasions -- as when, for example, the Greeks were defeated by the Macedonians -- when the conquerors adopt the tradition of those they have bested. In instances such as these, it cannot be argued that power established the untraditionality of the society *ex post facto* its conquering. However, to the extent that untraditionality under the new regime is maintained by the force of the conquerors (as when, for

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example, under slightly different circumstances the British *Raj*, after defeating India's traditional rulers, assisted them in maintaining their ascendancy in India's social hierarchy) as it most often would likely have to be, then power can still be seen to underlie the authority of the reigning tradition.

²¹ MacIntyre's view of the modern university would seem to confirm this. Late in *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* he laments the end of religious tests for university professors that the rise of the liberal university brought with it. Where "[e]ach . . . preliberal university was . . . to some some degree an institution embodying either one particular tradition of rational enquiry or a limited set of such traditions" (MacIntyre, 1988, p. 399), their liberal successors lack any coherent viewpoint at all (a circumstance communitarians would likely argue is mirrored in the societies which spawned these universities).

²² For example, those setting out the standards of the religious tests mandatory for aspiring university professors in the preliberal universities MacIntyre lauds (see footnote 21).

²³ The *Sharia* is Islam's religious law.

²⁴ MacIntyre himself puts forward mediaeval Christianity and Aristoteleanism as exemplars of his notion of a tradition. And while he does not discuss Constantinian-era Christianity or Indian Aryanism in either *After Virtue* or *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, I would argue that these constitute equally good examples of tradition-based societies of the type MacIntyre is advocating. I chose to include the former in the discussion that follows because it represents the earliest moment in history when Christianity became associated with the state and it therefore represents a good example of the role of power in founding a MacIntyre-type traditional society. I chose the latter since it is a little off the track MacIntyre has beaten in his analyses of mainly European-based great traditions (besides Aristoteleanism and mediaeval Christianity, he also discusses in *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* the Humean tradition as expressed in the Scottish social order). Interestingly, another communitarian, Michael Walzer, has discussed the Indian system of castes as mandated by Aryanism as an example of a defensible community-based morality (see p. 84, for example, of *Spheres of Justice* (Walzer, 1983)).

²⁵ The discussion here of power's role in the Christian tradition should not be understood to apply to *early* Christianity (the apostolic era to the early 300s) whose authority cannot in any reasonable way be argued to have been founded in power. But while early Christianity is in no way associated with power, as I argued at the outset of this chapter neither does it represent a paradigmatic MacIntyre-type tradition at that point in its development. Early Christian communities did not possess the state's power (being governed by the hostile Roman Empire) and, as a consequence, cannot be seen as being unitraditional societies like those MacIntyre is advocating. It is only in the

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later stages of Christianity's development that we see it taking on MacIntyre-type characteristics. In its Constantinian-era and Middle Ages formulations, Christian society becomes unitraditional, all-embracing, integrated with its society's social structures, institutions, and, most importantly, mechanisms of power. As with other MacIntyre-type traditions, Christianity in *this* form did base its authority in power.

26 Not to be confused with Indian Aryanism.

27 At least twenty-eight of those attending the Council of Nicaea, according to Harold Brown (1984, p. 117).

28 Brown's discussion of the early days of Empire Christianity is an interesting and informative one, and his understanding of the state of tradition-governed "rational enquiry" in this period of the Christian tradition is about as far from MacIntyre's vision as it is possible for it to be:

... from 340 to 380, the history of doctrine looks more like the history of court and church intrigues and social unrest. It is a potentially embarrassing fact that the central doctrines hammered out in this period often appear to have been put through by intrigue or mob violence rather than by the common consent of Christendom led by the Holy Spirit.

(Brown, 1984, p. 119)

29 Nor was it only Christians and Moslems who perished. Jews too, though not the Crusaders' primary target, were often killed by angry mobs in the grip of religious fervour. 800 "... were massacred by Crusaders setting out for the Holy Land" in one of the opening campaigns of the First Crusade in 1096, for example (Billings, 1990, p. 15).

30 In the "Parable of the Great Feast" (Luke 14:15 - 14:24), Jesus Christ tells of a man who gave a dinner which no one wished to attend:

[t]he master then ordered the servant, 'Go out to the highways and hedgerows and make people come in that my home may be filled.'

(Luke 14:23)

31

If thou shalt hear say in one of thy cities . . . , Let us go and serve other Gods . . . ; then shalt thou surely smite the inhabitants of that city with the edge of the sword, destroying it utterly and all that is therein. . . . And thou shalt burn with fire the city and all the spoil

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thereof every whit for the Lord thy God..
 And it shall be an heap forever; and it shall not be
 built again.

(Deuteronomy 13:12 - 13:16)

Jonathan Sumption quotes these lines in the opening of his book on the Albigensian Crusade (Sumption, 1978, p. 7 (*note: unconventional numbering scheme used*)).

32 James Bryce's description of the popular attitude at the time of Charlemagne's ascension might stand here as a summary of this point:

. . . men could not separate in fact what was
 indissoluble in thought: Christianity seemed to stand
 or fall along with the great Christian state: they were
 but two names for the same thing.

(Bryce, 1905, p. 47)

33 Women too were excluded from "rational enquiry" and the Assembly.

34 The caste system's authority extended even so far as to determining who in the society one was eligible to marry, with lower castes being forbidden to marry into upper caste families. While the dominance of the caste tradition was ended by the 1947 caste laws passed by Indian's government upon independence from British rule, the system is still highly influential in today's Indian society.

35 A factor which might be taken to imply that MacIntyre's recommendation that we create unitraditional societies in the present day is unrealistic, given the lack of such uniformity in our modern societies.

Chapter Three: Self-Contradictions in MacIntyre's Philosophy

Alasdair MacIntyre complains that our modern, liberal culture “seems to . . . [offer] . . . no way of securing moral agreement” (MacIntyre, 1981, p. 6). In this, he claims, liberal society resembles the Dark Ages, “a culture in which human life was in danger of being torn apart by the conflict of too many ideals, too many ways of life” (MacIntyre, 1981, p. 154). His solution to our modern woes is thus to suggest that we emulate the “men and women of good will” who on the cusp of the Dark Ages constructed “new forms of community within which the moral life could be sustained” through “the coming ages of barbarism and darkness” (MacIntyre, 1981, p. 245). The local forms of community MacIntyre can be seen to advocate both in his theory and in the historical paragons he offers up to us are communities governed by a single tradition providing for their members a definitive *telos*, an authoritative ordering of society, and a moral unity not available in our modern world. But these very characteristics imply and the reality of historical traditional societies shows that this tradition-driven unity is not naturally arising, but is derived from, established in, and maintained through power.

MacIntyre's work has its well-spring in his dislike for modernity, and his philosophy is built upon a detailed criticism of contemporary culture. In his criticisms, MacIntyre reveals much of himself and of his own values. It is this set of values, of course, which underlies his advocacy of the great traditions as definitive sources of moral wisdom in their local contexts. But because MacIntyre has failed to recognize the coercive nature of traditional authority, he has not recognized the extent to which these traditions come into conflict with the very values that led him to criticize modernity in the first place. It is necessary, then, to ask whether MacIntyre can coherently endorse the old traditional communities while remaining true to the other values to which he gives his philosophical allegiance. In this chapter, I will argue that

MacIntyre's endorsement of traditional societies is incompatible with his emphasis on rationality, his repudiation of emotivism, and his rejection of Nietzscheanism.

We can begin, perhaps, with the issue of rationality, for it is this concept which lies at the very heart of MacIntyre's political thought. According to MacIntyre, traditions function as a "mode of rational enquiry". The morality, *telos*, and social structure of a tradition-based community are arrived at, justified, elaborated, and sustained through the rational enquiry and debate of its inhabitants. This is

... a conception of rational enquiry as embodied in a tradition, a conception according to which the standards of rational justification themselves emerge from and are part of a history in which they are vindicated by the way in which they transcend the limitations of and provide remedies for the defects of their predecessors within the history of that same tradition.

(MacIntyre, 1988, p. 7)

Those traditions which cannot claim to be modes of rational enquiry are anathema to MacIntyre:

[n]ot all traditions, of course, have embodied rational enquiry as a constitutive part of themselves; and those thinkers of the Enlightenment who dismissed tradition because they took it to be the antithesis of rational enquiry were in some instances in the right.

(MacIntyre, 1988, p. 7)

But it is here where internal inconsistencies in MacIntyre's thought begin to make themselves felt; it is inconsistent to posit as legitimate and justifiable traditions which are the products of power while at the same time advocating rationality. For surely any system of thought must meet some minimum requirements before it can be called "rational". Freedom of mind and thought for its adherents, a logical standard by which truths are

determined, and access by those engaged in rational enquiry to all available information in service of their enquiry are some of the standards that come to mind. Yet each of these requirements is denied by traditional societies of the type MacIntyre advocates.

This assertion might be countered with the argument that the requirements of rationality as just outlined are too rigid. MacIntyre, after all, has argued that there are *many* rationalities, each with its own set of standards and tests for what is rational. How, then, is it reasonable to argue that rationality is defined by the three standards asserted above?

There are two possible responses to this view. It might first be pointed out that in order to be meaningfully used, the word “rationality” must have some minimal sort of content. Surely it cannot mean in one place “according to some standard” and in another “arbitrarily”. Thus, while the substantive *content* of rationality might be sensibly understood to vary along with the particularistic tradition shaping it, its overarching meaning and outline must have some specificity in order for MacIntyre to use the word as he does in his overarching theory of traditions.¹ This brings us to our second point, which is that that outline has in fact already been drawn by MacIntyre himself and can be traced in his references to the notion of rationality throughout his work. MacIntyre’s own views, along with the necessarily imputed content to rationality required to make the word meaningful affirm the minimum standards of rationality suggested above: freedom of mind and thought, a logical standard by which truths are determined, and access by thinkers to all available information in service of their enquiry.

That there is in fact a core content to the idea of rationality in MacIntyre’s philosophy can be seen quite clearly in his discussions of the subject. He accepts, for example, that “observance of the laws of logic . . . is a necessary [although not sufficient] condition for rationality” (MacIntyre,

1988, p. 4). He also condemns postmodernists (whom we might describe as representing a tradition of antitraditionalists) for the “indefinite multiplicity of possible interpretations” they make of traditional texts, and laments their abandonment of the “canons of accuracy” which require that one’s understanding of a text be controlled by “authorial intention” or “by [its] relationship to an audience with specific shared beliefs” (MacIntyre, 1988, p. 386). MacIntyre also argues that

. . . the *only* rational way for the adherents of any tradition to approach intellectually, culturally, and linguistically alien rivals is one that allows for the possibility that in one or more areas the other may be rationally superior to it.

(MacIntyre, 1988, p. 388, emphasis added)

Each of these statements implies on MacIntyre’s part a tradition-transcendent general conception of the meaning of rationality. The rules of logic apply to *all* traditions. The “canons of accuracy” are not subject to tradition-specific “standards of rational justification” or MacIntyre could not condemn the postmodernist approach. And there is only *one* rational way for the adherents of *any* tradition to approach alien rivals. Thus, while rationality may be a plastic concept in MacIntyre’s theory, its plasticity falls within certain limits inherent in the very meaning of the word.

What, then, is inherent in MacIntyre’s notion of rationality? First, it requires freedom of mind and thought. MacIntyre, after all, describes the process of practical reasoning about morality and justice as one of “rational *enquiry*”. Surely, then, rationality requires the freedom to make such enquiry, and the freedom to think about, discuss, and formulate conclusions about that into which one has made enquiry.

Secondly, rationality requires that truths be arrived at according to logical standards. MacIntyre himself acknowledges such an idea in the course

of discussing the characteristics of justice when he says that “[j]ustice requires that we treat others in respect of merit or desert according to *uniform and impersonal standards . . .*” (MacIntyre, 1981, p. 179, emphasis added). Decisions concerning justice are not to be arrived at by the arbitrary fiat of those making the decisions, but according to uniform and impersonal standards. The idea of logic to which MacIntyre gives his allegiance also requires that there be a comprehensible connection between descriptions of truth and that which is being described. If we wish to stay within the bounds of logic, we cannot, for example, say that a sapling in the Redwood Forest is a “tall” tree. Likewise, we cannot construct and assert merely on our own say so “truths” that are pure caprice or invention. If assertions are not directly grounded in that which has engendered them, they stand with no more authority than mere whimsy.

Thirdly, rationality requires that those engaged in rational decision-making have access to all the information available to them regarding their decision. This is inherent, again, in the notion of rationality as rational *enquiry*: a search for truth cannot be carried out without access to relevant information. MacIntyre also seems to suggest the necessity of such access when he argues that rival traditions can learn from each other by being open to hearing what the other has to say (MacIntyre, 1988, p. 388).

Clearly, then, there is a core content to the notion of rationality in MacIntyre’s thought, one which transcends the particularities of the world’s various great traditions. Furthermore, this core content -- the requirements of freedom of mind and thought, a logical standard of truth-determination, and access to all available information -- is incompatible with the power-based nature of such traditions.

Traditional societies of the type MacIntyre advocates can be seen to deny the freedom of mind and thought required by rationality in a number of

ways. Their social structures limit *who* speaks and contributes to the debates around their moral schemata. Their *teleological* commandments and canonical texts place limits on the *bounds* of that debate. And their placement in the hands of their authorities and advocates the powers of the police and the social structure creates the potential for limitations via censorship on *what* is said in such debates.

There is nothing inherent in the specific traditions MacIntyre has described or in traditions of the type he generally advocates that provides for all people in such a community the opportunity to contribute to their tradition's debates about practical rationality and justice. In fact, there is an apparent propensity in tradition-driven communities to take the exact opposite tack in denying to many of their members the privileges of participation in rational enquiry. In Aristotle's Athens, for example, women, slaves, and non-citizens were non-participants in the determination of their society's moral precepts. In mediaeval Christian societies, priests were given a specially authoritative role in such debates, a role which limited the ability of the laity to make contributions of any significance. And in tradition-driven communities of today we see similar exclusions, as for example of women from the rational elaboration of the Islamic tradition in Muslim societies such as Iran.²

Limitations like these are irrational, for they have no justification outside of the power of a society's tradition-establishers to make such exclusions. Furthermore, the denial of participation in rational deliberation to specific groups means that the additional information their perspectives might otherwise have brought to their society's debates is arbitrarily excluded. MacIntyre himself recognizes such consequences:

[w]hat is likely to affront us -- and rightly -- is Aristotle's writing off of non-Greeks, barbarians and slaves, as not merely not possessing political

relationships, but as incapable of them. With this we may couple his view that only the affluent and those of high status can achieve certain key virtues, those of munificence and of magnanimity; craftsmen and tradesmen constitute an inferior class, even if they are not slaves. Hence the peculiar excellences of the exercise of craft skill and manual labour are invisible from the standpoint of Aristotle's catalogue of the virtues.

(MacIntyre, 1981, p. 149)³

We might imagine that if slaves and craftsmen had not been excluded from rational deliberation in classical Greek society in the first place, their "peculiar excellences" would have been more visible, and their contributions to rational debate about justice and morality would have resulted in a fuller picture of life for Greek philosophers. The initial exclusion of such peoples was therefore not only irrational in itself, but irrational as well in producing a less rational than optimal philosophy within their community's reigning tradition.

The terms and parameters of debate already limited by exclusions such as these are also further limited in MacIntyre-type communities by the authority, influence, and power of these communities' reigning traditions, canonical texts and teleological commandments. Attributing canonical authority to given texts means that not everything is available for deliberation: at the very least, those engaged in rational enquiry can no longer publicly hypothesize or assert that the exact opposite of what their society's canonical texts say is true. Likewise, the authoritative ordering of a society's beliefs, practices, institutions, and social structure by an authoritative telos means that many alternative orderings or allocations of authority are not permitted. Atheism was not an option for mediaeval Europeans.

Finally, the placement of police powers in the hands of traditions'

keepers (the Athenian Assembly, the mediaeval Catholic Church, China's Central Committee, Iran's Mullahs, and so on) whose own power is derived from the authority of their tradition as it then stands risks creating the danger that even outcomes of an already limited debate that are undesirable can be suppressed. The censorship of Copernicus by mediaeval Catholicism is a good example of such oppression. We see here as well the potential incompatibility of the traditional societies MacIntyre recommends and his notion that traditions can overhear and interact with each other (MacIntyre, 1981, p. 350).⁴ How much of another tradition can inhabitants of MacIntyre-type traditional societies "overhear" when their whole system of life is built around and governed by their society's ruling tradition? Clearly, tradition-based rationality can be seen to contain within itself its own seeds of denial and irrationality.⁵

Each of these limitations inherent in tradition-based rationalities -- of who debates, of the boundaries of the debate, and of the outcomes of debate -- are limitations on the freedom of mind and thought necessary to any real rationality. These restrictions prevent those engaged in rational enquiry and debate from imagining or considering all the possible explanations, considerations, or premises of life. Meaningful rationality requires more.

The traditions MacIntyre advocates are also irrational in their transgressions of rationality's requirement that truths be arrived at according to some logical standard. The *teleological* and canonical truths of these traditions are founded not on logic, but upon the power-based assertions of their founders and builders. The "flawed metaphysical biology" of Aristoteleanism, for example, which MacIntyre himself rejects (MacIntyre, 1981, p. 152), is flawed in fact because it was based on the unfounded and therefore illogical assertion that slaves were inferior to citizens. The

Christian tradition of mediaeval Europe was based not on the actual divinity of Christ and existence of God, but on second-hand, unproven, and unprovable assertions of that divinity and existence made by the Apostles and sustained and made authoritative in later times by the powers of the mediaeval church. Likewise, Islam's *Sharia* and Judaism's Ten Commandments were put forward in their respective societies by *men* -- Mohammed and Moses -- not by God. They therefore had no more *logical* claim to the authority they assumed than do contemporary accounts of U.F.O. sightings. This is not particularly problematic when allegiance to such traditions is based on a free choice, but in their historical societies, these traditions demanded absolute allegiance. Claims to authority of this level are assertions that such "truths" no longer belong to the realm of the rational but have been removed from the possibility of doubt. This is an illogical attribution to the thoughts, beliefs, and arguments of men like Moses, Mohammed, and the Apostles the status of unassailable truth.

Tradition-based societies also breach the third of the requirements of rationality noted above -- that those engaged in rational decision-making have access to all the information available to them regarding their decisions. A crucial piece of information is and must be obscured for those living in *and* giving their allegiance to their community's notions of truth in traditional societies of the type MacIntyre commends. Members of the community cannot have an understanding of the higher-level truth of philosophies like MacIntyre's which assert that there are *multiple* intellectually legitimate rationalities. It is incoherent to believe that x is true and y (the truth of an opposed tradition, for example) is untrue (a set of beliefs that MacIntyre asserts that those adhering to a tradition must have⁶) while at the same time believing that there are multiple rationalities, one of which is y. The authority of the reigning tradition's truths in a traditional society can only be

coherently, logically maintainable if this piece of information is unavailable to its community's inhabitants. The denial of such data to inhabitants by the assumed authority of the community's reigning tradition is antirational.

In his article "Liberalism and Communitarianism", Will Kymlicka admirably discerns this aspect of irrationality in communitarian thought in general, arguing that the communitarian conception of the way in which truth is generated is irrational. He notes that

[t]he liberal view [of truth] operates through people's rationality -- *i. e.* it generates confidence in the value of one's projects by removing any impediments or distortions in the reasoning process involved in making judgments of value.

(Kymlicka, 1988, p. 196)⁷

The communitarian view, on the other hand,

. . . operates behind the backs of the individuals involved -- *i. e.* it generates confidence via a process which people can't acknowledge as the grounds of their confidence.

(Kymlicka, 1988, p. 196)

Confidence in the truths of "communal practices and traditions . . . [which are] taken as 'authoritative horizons'" (Kymlicka, 1988, p. 197) is "fostered by giving people causal reinforcement -- causes rather than reasons, as it were . . ." (Kymlicka, 1988, p. 196). It is clear that what Kymlicka says here applies in full to MacIntyre's philosophy, which does indeed appear to offer causal rather than rational grounds for the authority it asserts for the great traditions in their local contexts. This is implied in its positivist understanding of traditions' claims to truth (seen in statements such as "authority will have been conferred"), inherent in any social matrix type justifications of truth it might attempt to offer for such traditions, and, ultimately, locatable in the power-based foundation of the truths of the unitraditional societies to which it

advocates allegiance. All these are causal creators of “truth”, not reasons for belief. Rationality requires the latter rather than the former.

This is why Kymlicka argues that one can only endorse the truth-determining mechanisms of communitarianism from the third person position; *i. e.*, as in making a statement such as “the lives of *those* people will go better if they believe that philosophy x is the truth whether it is or not”. One cannot endorse the communitarian conception of truth from the first person position; *i. e.*, “my life will go better if I believe that philosophy x is the truth”, for being in a position to make such an argument precludes one from actually believing that philosophy x is the truth (for one’s acceptance of x would in such a case be based on its *desirability*, not on its *trueness*). The absolute claims to the truth made by and for traditions are sustainable only because they bring with them the other baggage of traditional societies: the power inherent in their mechanisms of enforcement to deny to members of the community the full picture that would otherwise be available to them. Included in this denial are denials of knowledge of the power-based foundation of their reigning tradition’s authority and of the higher level truths about rationality that philosophers like MacIntyre reserve to themselves even while advocating the unitraditional life inherent in such tradition-driven societies.

The attribution by MacIntyre of authority to traditions depending heavily on power for their maintenance is inconsistent with his equally strong demand that such traditions be *rational*. The limitations that traditional society places upon who speaks, what constitutes the bounds of debate, and the outcomes of such debate deny the freedom of mind and thought necessary to rationality. The absolute authority that traditions have in MacIntyre-type societies and their power therein to enforce their potentially doubtful claims infringes the requirement of rationality that truths be established according

to a logical standard of truth-determination. And the denials that such traditions must make of the foundation in power of their social truths, and of the possible higher level truth of overarching philosophies (like MacIntyre's) asserting the possibility of multiple rationalities are denials of rationality's requirement that those engaged in rational enquiry have access to all available information. MacIntyre argues in *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* that "[o]nly those whose tradition allows for the possibility of its hegemony being put into question can have rational warrant for asserting such a hegemony" (MacIntyre, 1988, p. 388). This is uncontroversial. What is controversial is the notion that traditional societies of the type he advocates are constituted in such a way that that hegemony can be put into question. Their foundation in power and the contiguity they maintain between morality, law, and their social structure make power, not reason, their fundamental quality. Traditions are, in a significant way, anti-rational, and MacIntyre's thought is therefore in this way self-contradictory.

The second important self-contradictory element in MacIntyre's philosophy arises in regard to the issue of emotivism. While MacIntyre is clearly an opponent of the emotivist understanding of morality, his theory itself is at the same time emotivist in very significant ways.

Let us begin by tracing MacIntyre's position on this issue. He defines emotivism as

. . . the doctrine that all evaluative judgments and more specifically all moral judgments are *nothing but* expressions of preference, expressions of attitude or feeling, insofar as they are moral or evaluative in character. . . . Factual judgments are true or false; and in the realm of fact there are rational criteria by means of which we may secure agreement as to what is true and what is false. But moral judgments, being expressions of attitude or feeling, are neither true nor false; and agreement in moral judgment is not to be secured by any rational method, for there are none. It is to be secured, if at all, by producing certain non-rational

effects on the emotions or attitudes of those who disagree with one. We use moral judgments not only to express our own feelings and attitudes, but also precisely to produce such effects in others.

(MacIntyre, 1981, p. 11)

In short, to say that “x” is morally good is, in the emotivist understanding, not to say “according to some external criteria, ‘x’ is good”, but to say *only* “I approve of this; do so as well” (MacIntyre, 1981, p. 13). MacIntyre clearly rejects this conception of morality, going so far as to say that “it is indeed in terms of a confrontation with emotivism that my own thesis must be defined” (MacIntyre, 1981, p. 21). This rejection of emotivism comes on a number of grounds, but two are of particular interest to us here.

The first ground upon which MacIntyre’s rejection of emotivism is based is the argument that morality *cannot* mean, as emotivist theorists insist, “do ‘x’ because that is what I want”. Imputing such a meaning to morality leads to an intellectual dead-end, MacIntyre argues. Emotivists propose that “moral judgments express feelings or attitudes . . . of approval” (MacIntyre, 1981, p. 14). But there are many kinds of approval. When asked the sort of approval such a judgment implies, emotivists must either identify “the relevant kind of approval as moral approval” -- thus making their arguments vacuously circular” (MacIntyre, 1981, p. 14) -- or remain silent. In either case, the possibility is therefore still left open that there is a unique meaning to the word “moral” which the emotivist conception does not capture.

Furthermore, emotivism can be argued to have been

. . . engaged in an impossible task from the beginning, because it is dedicated to characterising as equivalent in meaning two kinds of expressions which . . . derive their distinctive function in our language in key part from the contrast and difference between them.

(MacIntyre, 1981, p. 12)

There is no particular function left to the word “moral” if it cannot be contradistinguished from “I want it to be the case that . . .”. People do not understand the word to have this meaning or themselves to be expressing such meaning when they engage in moral discourse.

Finally, MacIntyre argues that the mere statement “this is right” cannot in itself reveal feeling or attitude and therefore statements of moral evaluation cannot sensibly be decoded as expressions of feeling or attitude. For it is in the use of sentences “on particular occasions” and not in their lexical meaning that feeling or attitude is revealed. MacIntyre cites Gilbert Ryle’s example of the angry schoolmaster venting “his feelings by shouting at the small boy who has just made an arithmetical mistake, ‘[s]even times seven equals forty-nine!’” (MacIntyre, 1981, p. 13). Feeling and attitude here are unrelated to meaning. Presumably, then, we might also imagine instances in which a speaker might say “x is the right thing to do” while abhorring the thought of actually doing so. Each of these points indicates then that it is not possible to construe the word moral as being a direct equivalent to “I want it” or “I like it”. Morality has a deeper meaning than this.

While the first ground upon which MacIntyre rejects emotivism is that morality *cannot* mean what emotivists say it does, his second ground for that rejection is that morality *should not* be construed in emotivist terms because of the negative consequences such a conception brings with it. Emotivism, we are told, entails “. . . the obliteration of any genuine distinction between manipulative and non-manipulative social relations . . .” (MacIntyre, 1981, p. 22). As an illustration of the notion of non-manipulative social relations, MacIntyre gives us Kant’s dictum of treating people as ends, not means:

[f]or Kant -- and a parallel point could be made about many earlier moral philosophers -- the difference between a human relationship uninformed by morality and one so informed is precisely the difference between one in which each person treats

the other primarily as a means to his or her ends and one in which each treats the other as an end. To treat someone as an end is to offer them what I take to be good reasons for acting in one way rather than another, but to leave it to them to evaluate those reasons. It is to be unwilling to influence another except by reasons which that other he or she judges to be good. It is to appeal to impersonal criteria of the validity of which each rational agent must be his or her own judge. By contrast, to treat someone else as a means is to seek to make him or her an instrument of my purposes by adducing whatever influences or considerations will in fact be effective in this or that occasion. The generalisations of the sociology and psychology of persuasion are what I shall need to guide me, not the standards of a normative rationality.
(MacIntyre, 1981, pp. 22 - 3)

And this kind of manipulation is indeed what emotivism requires. MacIntyre goes on to point out that

[i]f emotivism is true, this distinction [between persuasion and rationality] is illusory. For evaluative utterance can in the end have no point or use but the expression of my own feelings or attitudes and the transformation of the feelings and attitudes of others. I cannot genuinely appeal to impersonal criteria, for there are no impersonal criteria. I may think that I so appeal and others may think that I so appeal, but these thoughts will always be mistakes. The sole reality of distinctively moral discourse is the attempt of one will to align the attitudes, feelings, preferences and choices of another with its own. Others are always means, never ends.
(MacIntyre, 1981, p. 23)

To put it more briefly, emotivism imagines moral decision-making not as debate between parties with the aim of reaching a rational understanding of what is right, but as something more akin to a mutual sales pitch in which each party attempts to manipulate by whatever means necessary the other's agreement to his self-interested⁸ proposition. Others become means to one's emotivistically moral ends rather than rationally moral ends in themselves.

The dynamics and constitution of MacIntyre-type traditional societies make for emotivistic sales pitches and manipulative social relationships rather than rational debate. Because those engaged in authoritative rational enquiry and debate in traditional societies (as earlier encapsulated, the Athenian Assembly, the mediaeval Catholic Church, China's Central Committee, Iran's Mullahs, and so on) are in positions of social preeminence and power as a result of the ordering of society as it has been directed by their tradition, they have both incentive and power to find in their rational enquiry and deliberation continued rational justification for the maintenance of the social system as it is. The ongoing elaboration and justification of the *teleological* standards and truths of MacIntyre-type traditions is therefore at least potentially emotivist in that its practitioners have both the opportunity and the motive to generate arguments not based in "truth", but rather aimed at manipulating the acceptance of those lower in the social hierarchy of the continuation of things as they are.

We have seen that traditional societies of the MacIntyre-type limit *who* engages in debate. "Debate" of this type, then, is not in all cases a give-and-take between equals who hold differing views, but, like a sales pitch, a monologue delivered to an audience whom the speaker wishes to convince. Priests speak to their flock, the Athenian Assembly determines the social order without reference to potential arguments from women and slaves, and the central committee dictates to the proletariat. Also as in advertising, those making the "pitch" in societies of the type MacIntyre advocates speak from a pre-conferred authority that lends itself to the arguments they make. Modern advertising features the professional athlete whose sporting triumphs ostensibly lend credence to his claim that we ought to prefer Coca-Cola to Pepsi; MacIntyre's traditions offer pitches by those upon whom society has "conferred" authority; again, Athenian citizens, priests, mullahs, Communist

Party members, and the like. One might imagine that in a wholly Catholic society, for example, it would be difficult to successfully engage priests in arguments about the existence of God.

Worst of all, traditional societies give those engaged in rational enquiry very good reason to make as the ends of their debate the justification of their tradition's point of view rather than a rational discovery of the truth. The elevated position in the social structure of those engaged in rational enquiry is imperilled by outcomes in the debate that diverge from the truths the tradition has already established. Priests, Athenian citizens, and Communist Party members are all at risk of a grave move down in the world if their claims to authority as certified by their tradition are rebutted. There is in such a situation a positive incentive to transform MacIntyre's "rational enquiry" into *rationalizing* enquiry,⁹ in which those seeking to justify their own positions rely upon whatever arguments will suit that purpose.¹⁰ Julio Cueta-Rua makes such a point in discussing the role of judges in society:

[t]he judge, as a member of the community, is a part of the social structure. He is keenly aware of his privileged position in the group. Through his own experience, he has learned how important it is that the mechanisms and institutions of the social group operate efficiently and he has grasped the nature and scope of his intervention and how vital that intervention is to the preservation of those mechanism and institutions. He realizes that his own judicial function is essentially linked to the proper functioning of the social structures of power. The adjudication of a case and the subsequent enforcement of the judgment are, *inter alia*, expressions of power which, in this context, are used to neutralize the divisive nature of disputes between members of the same community. The judge understands very well that the realization of power is a condition *sine qua non* for the subsistence of the community as a community. He realizes also that he as a judge, an organ of the community, is called upon to protect the existence of the community, to preserve its organization, and to maintain the efficient

operation of those mechanisms by which the group sets and achieves its goals. The judge is therefore most reluctant to take any action that might jeopardize the institutions which the social group has organized for the preservation and for the advancement of its objectives.

(Cueta-Rua, 1981, p. 224)

Unsurprisingly, it is possible to find a wide range of historical examples upon which we can draw in illustrating similar phenomena in MacIntyre-type societies. One is reminded of Lenin's conception of the role of the literati in a communist society, for example:

. . . the socialist proletariat must put forward the principle of *party literature*, must develop this principle and put it into practice as fully and completely as possible.

What is this principle of party literature? It is not simply that, for the socialist proletariat, literature cannot be a means of enriching individuals or groups: it cannot, in fact, be an individual undertaking, independent of the common cause of the proletariat. Down with non-partisan writers! Down with literary supermen! Literature must become *part* of the common cause of the proletariat, 'a cog and a screw' of one single great Social-Democratic mechanism of the entire working class. Literature must become a component of organised, planned and integrated Social-Democratic Party work.

(Lenin, 1905, p. 45)

Or, of South Africa's Dutch Reformed Church, which attempted to stay within the Christian motif while at the same time finding rationalization in the Bible (their canonical text) for Apartheid and the social dominance and oppression by its white members of the country's black population. Paul's admonition that slaves obey their masters¹¹ and the Book of Joshua's assertion that some men are destined to be "hewers of wood and drawers of water"¹² are examples of two lines drawn upon to make such self-serving justifications.

Even one of MacIntyre's own references brings to mind the evidentness

of rationalization in some of the so-called rational enquiry of traditional societies. In discussing his conception of epistemological crises in traditions, MacIntyre notes that “imaginative conceptual innovation [has] . . . to occur” (MacIntyre, 1988, p. 362) in order to successfully overcome such crises, and that

[e]xamples of . . . successfully creative outcomes to more or less serious epistemological crises, affecting some greater or lesser area of the subject matter with which a particular tradition-constituted enquiry is concerned, are not hard to come by, either in the traditions with whose history I have been concerned here or elsewhere. Newman’s own central example was of the way in which in the fourth century the definition of the Catholic doctrine of the Trinity resolved the controversies arising out of competing interpretations of scripture by a use of philosophical and theological concepts whose understanding had itself issued from debates rationally unresolved up to that point.

(MacIntyre, 1988, p. 362)

But was the solution to the intellectual problem of the Trinity “successful” because it provided a rationally satisfying explanation of the incoherencies inherent in that notion or because it was sufficient to satisfy those who wanted to find themselves satisfied -- the authoritative elite engaging in rational enquiry? In his autobiography, *Goodbye To All That*, poet Robert Graves recounts a rather amusing tale which implies the latter. In describing his ceremony of confirmation in the Anglican faith, Graves, at the time a schoolboy, notes that a classmate undergoing confirmation at the same time confessed himself to be an atheist, saying,

. . . of the Trinity, that anybody who could agree with the Athanasian Creed that “whoever will be saved must confess that there are not Three Incomprehensible but One Incomprehensible” was asserting that a man must go to Hell if he does not believe something that is, by definition, impossible to understand. His own respect for himself as a reasonable being forbade him to believe such things.

(Graves, 1983 [1929]), p. 45)

Surely if the irrationalities in the Athanasian solution to the inherent incoherencies of the doctrine of the Trinity were readily apparent to Graves' sixteen-year-old school chum, they must have been through the history of the various Christian traditions equally apparent at least to some of those spending their lives engaged in rational exploration of the topic. We might therefore imagine that this "imaginative conceptual innovation" to which MacIntyre refers has -- given its apparently patent irrationality -- something other than rational discovery as its progenesis. Solutions such as these represent not rational enquiry, but rationalizing enquiry, aimed, whether consciously or unconsciously, at preserving the authority of the reigning tradition, and, of course, thereby the authority of those privileged by it.¹³

We see, then, that traditional societies are emotivist in at least two ways. As our earlier analysis revealed, the truths of such societies are established and maintained in power. Such truths are therefore more accurately understood as being expressions of "what I want" by their powerful establishers, canonical text-writers, and "rationally-enquiring" authorities than as impersonal standards established via rational enquiry. And as has just been outlined, the constitution and dynamics of societies of the type MacIntyre recommends is such that the manipulative social relationships unavoidably inherent in emotivist philosophy are encouraged. Because the social position and authority of those engaging in rational enquiry in such societies is derived from truths established by their reigning tradition, those so engaging have both the power and incentive to make their rational enquiries "rationalizing enquiries" -- that is, enquiries producing whatever justifications of the current state of "truth" necessary to succeed in maintaining things as they are. In such circumstances, rational debate becomes not a mutual search for the truth, but the manipulative "sales pitch" characteristic of emotivism. Thus, MacIntyre falls into inconsistency in

repudiating emotivism while simultaneously advocating the emotivist truths and emotivistic procedures of rational enquiry of traditional communities whose foundation and continuing function is based in power.

Perhaps the most important area of self-contradiction in MacIntyre's work arises in regard to the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche. In a chapter entitled "Nietzsche or Aristotle?" in *After Virtue*, MacIntyre expresses his preference for the latter, asserting that "if Aristotle's position in ethics and politics -- or something very like it -- can be sustained, the whole Nietzschean enterprise would be pointless" (MacIntyre, 1981, p. 111). But although he overtly rejects the teachings of Nietzsche, MacIntyre can be seen to have a great deal in common with that German philosopher.

Nietzsche argues that philosophy is not about truth, but about the personal "instincts" of philosophers. This instinct takes the form of a desire on the part of philosophers to shape the world in their own image:

. . . as soon as any philosophy starts to believe in itself
 . . . it always creates the world in its own image; it
 cannot do otherwise. Philosophy is this tyrannical
 drive itself, to the most spiritual will to power, to the
 "creation of the world", to the *causa prima*.
 (Nietzsche, 1966 [1886], p. 16)

For Nietzsche, claims to "truth" are merely manifestations of this "will to power". MacIntyre has rejected such a notion, holding instead that the truths of the great traditions are objective and rational within their local contexts.

But in fact there are numerous connections between power and truth in the tradition-driven societies MacIntyre advocates. Our earlier antipositivist examination of MacIntyre-type communities revealed, for example, radical discontinuities in the beliefs, practices, and institutions of such societies in the period before and the period after the establishment of the hegemony of their great traditions. The definitive "truths" expressed in the social

structures and *telos* of such societies were found to be established and maintained through exercises of power. While MacIntyre condemns “Nietzschean man, the *Übermensch*,” for “dictat[ing] his own new law and his own new table of the virtues” (MacIntyre, 1981, p. 239), the founding of traditions represents this very kind of dictation. The radical discontinuity in the regime of truth before and after the founding of a MacIntyre-type traditional society represents just such a new set of laws. And by MacIntyre’s own definition, a *telos* can be seen as nothing other than a “new table of the virtues”, setting out as it does a prioritization and valuation of the virtues where none had existed before. *Pace* MacIntyre’s belief in the rationality and objectivity of the moral wisdom of the great traditions, then, truth is equated with power in societies governed by them. Although MacIntyre explicitly rejects the Nietzschean view, his approval of such societies represents an implicitly Nietzschean understanding of truth as being connected with power.

Given his equation of truth with power, it is understandable that Nietzsche rejects truths founded in “weakness”, celebrating instead the “truths” of the powerful. He argues, for example, that Christianity is a philosophy of the weak – “history from the point of view of the victim” (Nietzsche, 1956 [1887], p. 178). In Nietzsche’s eyes, this weakness is perfectly symbolized by Christianity’s most compelling symbol, a crucified God (Nietzsche, 1956 [1887], p. 169). Because of its foundation in weakness, Nietzsche rejects Christianity, as he rejects all world views of the weak. He embraces instead the passionate, Dionysian *weltanschauung*, a way of being invested with the power, strength, and beauty of the *noble*, rather than of the “herd”.¹⁴

A closer examination of the traditional societies which MacIntyre celebrates indicates that they too have their foundation in the world views of the noble and powerful¹⁵ rather than in the values of the entire society from

which they arise. Evidence of this can be seen in at least three aspects of MacIntyre's thought.

First, the very fact that a community is dominated by a single tradition, expressing a singular *teleological* world view evaluating and prioritizing previously diverse and divergent practices, implies, as our earlier arguments indicated, that power is the basis of that monolithicity. The newly absolutized truths in a MacIntyre-type society represent a radical discontinuity from what preceded them and can therefore be seen only as the truths of their powerful establishers and not as the truths of the entire society in which they were spawned.

Secondly, MacIntyre explicitly acknowledges a role for what is the equivalent of a "nobility" in this process. He argues that the moral wisdom of the great traditions has its expression in what he calls "canonical texts". Thus, "[k]nowing how to go on and to go further" [in the elaboration of a tradition]

. . . is part . . . of linguistic capacity as such; making this knowledge in key part dependent upon the reading of texts whose writing required this capacity to an exemplary degree provides just the kind of linguistic foundation which a tradition constituted in part by philosophically sophisticated enquiry requires. For such a tradition, if it is to flourish at all, as we have already learned, has to be embodied in a set of texts which function as the authoritative point of departure for tradition-constituted enquiry and which remain as essential points of reference for enquiry and activity, for argument, debate, and conflict within that tradition.

(MacIntyre, 1988, p. 383)

Given that literacy has historically been an attribute of only a small, wealthy, powerful elite, the very fact that the truths of the great traditions are seen by MacIntyre as being textual implies their having been given expression by and their being available primarily to those not of the illiterate "herd".

Thirdly, because a society's reigning tradition brings with it a social

structure based on its own conception of the truth, its powerful establishers come to fill positions with continuing power. They and those who later follow them are privileged by holding the positions of significant rational enquiry in their communities. The truths that are expressed and elaborated in such societies therefore continue to be the truths of the “nobility”¹⁷ rather than of the society as a whole. It is apparent, then, that MacIntyre’s ideal society is, like Nietzsche’s, one constructed by and for the powerful.

Nietzsche’s rejection of Christianity and applause for the Dionysian is ultimately based in his own purely personal preference for the Bacchic *voir de vivre*. He rejects Christianity and embraces the Dionysian world view not because of the “trueness” of the latter, but on purely esthetic grounds:

[n]o doubt, the purely esthetic justification of the world I was propounding in those pages [of the *Birth of Tragedy*] placed them at the opposite pole from Christian doctrine, a doctrine . . . using absolute standards: God’s absolute truth, for example.
(Nietzsche, 1956 [1872], p. 10)

This purely esthetic foundation for the selection of one’s personal “truth” befits a superman, who must stand free and above the constraints of lesser men. As MacIntyre aptly notes, Nietzschean man “finds his good only in that in himself which dictates his own new law . . .” (MacIntyre, 1981, p. 239).

Despite his open scorn for the *Übermensch*, MacIntyre appears to envision under certain circumstances a “MacIntyrean man” whose choice of ethic is similarly based on esthetic or otherwise personal criteria rather than on “truth”. Of course, while Nietzsche advocates this kind of choice in *all* circumstances for those capable of it (the *Übermensch*), MacIntyre differs in advocating it only when it has been necessitated by the absence of an authoritative tradition in the life of the chooser -- as in our traditionless modern times.¹⁷ His preference is clearly for a world in which such a choice

is unnecessary, as in the untraditional societies he applauds from our past and advocates for our future. But where there is such a choice, as for those in modern societies who have “not as yet . . . given their allegiance to some coherent tradition of enquiry” (MacIntyre, 1988, p. 393), MacIntyre is Nietzschean in advocating choice based not on “truth” (for there can be none outside of a tradition), but upon criteria personal to the chooser.¹⁸

For MacIntyre, “rationality” in such situations is idiosyncratic.¹⁹ He notes, for example, that a person who has as yet not “given their [sic] allegiance to some coherent tradition of enquiry”,

. . . is confronted by the claims of each of the traditions which we have considered as well as by those of other traditions. How is it rational to respond to them? The initial answer is: that will depend upon who you are and how you understand yourself.

(MacIntyre, 1988, p. 393)

Or, to put it more precisely:

[w]hat each person is confronted with is at once a set of rival intellectual positions, a set of rival traditions . . . , each making a claim upon the individual’s allegiance. It is by the relationship between what is specific to each such standpoint, embodied at these three levels of doctrine, history, and discourse, *and what is specific to the beliefs and history of each individual who confronts these problems, that what the problems are for that person is determined.*

(MacIntyre, 1988, pp. 393, emphasis added)

The vulgarism “different strokes for different folks” might aptly summarize MacIntyre’s position here. In such circumstances, what is taken as true is not a function of the truth itself, but of the capacities, needs, preferences, even *tastes* of the chooser. The Nietzschean ethic of choice for the sake of esthetics is little different.

This view is borne out by examination of MacIntyre's elaboration of the choosing process, where he discusses the different processes of choice undergone by different choosers. One type of chooser is he

... for whom what an encounter with some particular tradition of thought and action in respect of these matters may provide is an occasion for self-recognition and self-knowledge. Such a person will characteristically have learned to speak and write some particular language-in-use, the presuppositions of whose use tie that language to a set of beliefs which that person may never have explicitly formulated for him or herself except in partial and occasional ways. He or she will characteristically have found themselves responsive to certain texts, less so or not at all to others, open to certain kinds of argumentative consideration, unpersuaded by others. Upon encountering a coherent presentation of one particular tradition of rational enquiry, either in its seminal texts or in some later, perhaps contemporary, restatement of its positions, such a person will often experience a shock of recognition: *this* is not only, so such a person may say, what I now take to be true but in some measure *what I have always taken to be true*. What such a person has been presented with is a scheme of overall belief within which many, if not all, of his or her particular established beliefs fall into place ...

(MacIntyre, 1988, p. 394, emphasis added)

For this type of chooser, "truth" is determined not by a recognition of its trueness, but by recognizing what one *already* believes in an existing expressed tradition. But "what one has always taken to be true" is not necessarily true. In this situation, one's own preknowledge becomes the measure of all things.

Another, rarer type of chooser in MacIntyre's view is he who has had little or no prior connection with any kind of tradition and therefore possesses no preknowledge. MacIntyre asks,

[h]ow, if at all, could such a person as a result of an encounter with some particular tradition of rational enquiry come instead to inhabit that tradition as a

rational agent? What kind of transformation would be required?

Such a transformation, understood from the standpoint of any rational tradition of enquiry, would require that those who adopt this stance become able not only to recognize themselves as imprisoned by a set of beliefs which lack justification in precisely the same way and to the same extent as do the positions they reject but also to understand themselves as hitherto deprived of what tradition affords, as persons in part constituted as what they are up to this point by an absence, by what is from the standpoint of traditions an impoverishment.

(MacIntyre, 1988, p. 396)

Thus, while according to MacIntyre one is to reject one's traditionless past on the grounds of its unjustifiability, one is to opt *for* a tradition not because it is more justifiable or truer (since, as MacIntyre points out here, traditions themselves "lack justification in precisely the same way") but because it is *self-enriching*. Ultimately, then, for MacIntyre the choice of truth in the modern situation is *individual-centred*, not *truth-centred*. For the chooser with preknowledge of a tradition, that choice is based on self-recognition -- "truth" becomes a mirror. For the traditionless chooser, choice is based on the possibility of acquiring a richer experience -- "truth" becomes a gratification. In either case, the Nietzschean resonances are clear. The validity of a tradition for these sorts of people is based not upon its trueness, but upon its measuring up on their own personal scales. For MacIntyre, modern man, like the Nietzschean superman, decides upon his own criteria what form a good and satisfying truth is to take.

But there is another aspect of MacIntyre's theory in which the Nietzschean superman troublingly raises his head. Nietzsche has a bilevel conception of "truth" and knowledge. At the higher of the two levels resides the *Uberschensch*. He is a rare breed, one of the few who realize that there is no actual "truth" or source of truth in this world. Knowing this, the *Uberschensch* creates his own compelling truth, or philosophy, or mythology

which he gives to those at the lower level to spare them the horror of the realization that there is in place of truth only an abyss of nothingness. At the lower level in the Nietzschean view is the herd, the masses, who believe absolutely the truth provided to them by their superman. His truth, or philosophy, or mythology is for them reality.

MacIntyre's philosophy is Nietzschean in similarly differentiating between those who know the higher level truth and those who only experience a lower level of that truth. It is from the higher level of truth that MacIntyre speaks when he talks of choosing between traditions. And it is from this level that he makes his argument that there are multiple particularistic rationalities whose claim to truth can only extend as far as the boundaries (literal or figurative) of the communities in which they are expressed. At the lower level are these particularistic rationalities themselves, whose claim to truth is, for their adherents, absolute and universal. It is to those at this level that MacIntyre addresses his argument that we embrace Aristoteleanism as our own tradition of rational enquiry. But as was argued earlier, knowledge of the "truth" at the higher level of MacIntyre's philosophy naturally precludes complete belief in any of the traditions of rational enquiry that are "true" at the lower level of his theory. One cannot simultaneously believe that one particularistic tradition is "true" while at the same time believing that everyone's great tradition is true "for them". Traditions make their claims in universalist terms -- the Aristotelian metaphysical biology, Christ's divinity, the scientificism of Marxism, and Mohammed's prophecies are, for the adherents of those traditions, absolutes. But this implies two different types of believers in MacIntyre's world view. There are those who know that we live in a world of multiple, equally legitimate, particularistic rationalities -- the supermen -- and those who "know" that their own particular tradition of rational enquiry is the only

truth -- the masses, the herd.

As was earlier noted, Will Kymlicka has argued that communitarianism's truth-determining mechanisms can only be endorsed from the third person position -- *i. e.*, "the lives of those people will go better if they believe that philosophy 'x' is the truth even if it is not". We cannot endorse the communitarian conception of truth from the first person position -- "my life will go better if I believe in philosophy x". That third person position earlier discussed is at this point in our argument revealed to be that of the Nietzschean superman. It is this position that MacIntyre takes, wittingly or not, when he simultaneously argues against the universal notion of truth and for our embracing the particularistic truths of Aristoteleanism or any other particularistic "rationality".

MacIntyre's philosophy is Nietzschean in a variety of ways. Like Nietzscheanism, MacIntyre's philosophy equates truth with power: the social truths, social structure, and *telos* of MacIntyre-type societies are founded in and maintained through acts of power by their traditions' establishers and authorities. Like Nietzsche, MacIntyre advocates a power-based, elitist world view. The traditional societies that MacIntyre applauds are founded by the powerful, expressed in the canonical works of their society's literate nobility, and maintained almost exclusively by the limited social elite privileged with the opportunity to engage in their society's significant rational enquiry (Athenian citizens, mediaeval Catholic priests, members of the Central Committee, and Iranian mullahs). The truths of these societies are the truths of the nobility, not the truths of all. Like Nietzsche, MacIntyre conceives of choosing one's "truth" or tradition (when, as in the modern context, MacIntyre envisions any choice at all) based not on its trueness, but upon the chooser's own criteria, whether that be self-recognition, self-gratification, or otherwise personal grounds. And finally, MacIntyre's theory, like Nietzsche's,

envisions two levels of “truth”, and two levels of knowledge of that truth. At the higher of these levels, MacIntyre emulates Nietzsche’s superman in speaking of multiple, equally legitimate, particularistic rationalities; at the lower of these levels, he advocates embracing only one of these particularistic rationalities -- Aristoteleanism is his own preferred choice -- as one’s absolute truth. Truth at this level is like that Nietzsche recommends for the masses; something to shelter them from the frightening knowledge of the higher level truth (or lack of it) above them. MacIntyre believes himself to be a foe of Nietzsche, but the traditional societies he celebrates are on many significant counts fundamentally Nietzschean.

It is interesting, then, that MacIntyre claims that it is in *liberalism* that the Nietzschean *Übermensch* shows his face:

[t]he concept of the Nietzschean “great man” is . . . a pseudo-concept, although not always perhaps -- unhappily -- what I earlier called a fiction. It represents individualism’s final attempt to escape from its own consequences. And the Nietzschean stance turns out not to be a mode of escape from or an alternative to the conceptual scheme of liberal individualist modernity, but rather one more representative moment in its internal unfolding. *And we may therefore expect liberal individualist societies to breed “great men” from time to time. Alas!*

(MacIntyre, 1981, p. 241, emphasis added)

But MacIntyre fails to give us even a single example of a liberal-spawned Nietzschean “great man”. The truths of the societies MacIntyre advocates are, as we have seen, founded in power and maintained in power. It is societies of this kind, not their modern liberal counterparts, which have spawned “great men” such as Bernardo Gui, Josef Stalin, the Ayatollah Khomeini, and the slave-holding, philosophically-debating citizens of ancient Greece.

Notes

¹ It might be suggested that this bifaceted notion of rationality, in which the concept has a general meaning and at the same time varied, specific manifestations, parallels MacIntyre's bifaceted notion of the role of the virtues in human practices. MacIntyre suggests an overall definition of virtue as

. . . an acquired human quality the possession and exercise of which tends to enable us to achieve those goods which are internal to practices and the lack of which effectively prevents us from achieving any such goods.

(MacIntyre, 1981, p. 178)

Every practices requires of its practitioners the cardinal virtues of justice, courage, and truthfulness (MacIntyre, 1981, p. 179). But the particular form of each of these virtues varies from practice-to-practice. The virtue of courage in automobile racing differs from its counterpart in the field of artistic expression. Similarly, it is suggested here that while there may be multiple rationalities as MacIntyre suggests, the use of the word rationality -- as of the word virtue -- carries some core content.

² Muslim feminist Khajifa Hafhadjii has argued, for example, that women have an excellent set of basic rights outlined for them in the Koran, but that in Muslim societies they have not had access to opportunities to exercise these rights because they have been excluded from education, academia, politics, the courts, and other significant institutions of, to import MacIntyre's nomenclature, rational enquiry. "As It Happens", CBC Radio, 07 February 1996.

³ For some reason, MacIntyre seems to have left out women from his list of those whose "writing off" by Aristotle affronts him. But of course Aristotle "wrote off" women as well as non-Greeks, barbarians, and slaves:

[a]gain, the relation of male to female is naturally that of superior to inferior -- of the ruling to the ruled.

(Aristotle, *Politics*, Book 1, Chapter V)

⁴ See footnote 13 in Chapter Two above for an earlier discussion of this point.

⁵ A recent Kuwaiti court case offers a striking contemporary example of the workings of unitraditionality in today's world:

A Kuwaiti convert to Christianity appeared in court Wednesday in the Muslim country's first judicial

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hearing into a charge of apostasy.

Hussein Qambar Ali, 45, a thin figure in Western-style jacket and trousers, was summoned to the Gulf state's family court to answer a civil suit seeking to strip him of several civil rights on the grounds that he abandoned his religion.

"I feel like an alien in my own hometown," Ali said after the hearing. "How can I be safe with this lawsuit going on?"

"I am isolated completely from my family. I survive on donations from the church. I have had to shelter with some friends in their homes," said Ali, who carried a Bible into the courtroom and wore a cross.

Public abandonment of Islam is extremely rare in the Arab world. The former businessman's conversion has been denounced in Kuwaiti mosques by preachers and in parliament by Islamist MPs.

In Islam, any Muslim considered sane who renounces his religion and persists in doing so after being allowed a chance to repent, loses a range of rights. Islam provides no penalty for any Muslim who kills the convert on the grounds of his apostasy.

"We want the court to deprive him of his civil rights: marriage to a Muslim, custody of Muslim children and inheritance," said Mohammed al-Jadai, one of three lawyers who launched the private suit.

Jadai said a precedent was set by a Cairo court's decision last year to end the happy marriage of Egyptian professor Nasr Abu Zeid on the grounds of apostasy.

("Ex-Muslim on trial for apostasy",
Calgary Herald, March 07, 1996, p. A7)

6

The claim made within each tradition that the presently established beliefs shared by the adherents of that tradition are true entails a denial that

[other] intellectually, culturally, linguistically alien rivals . . . may be rationally superior to it . . .

(MacIntyre, 1988, p. 388)

⁷ The citation here of this point by Kymlicka is not intended to be an incorporation herein of specifically *liberal* criticisms of MacIntyre's world view. It is intended, rather, to establish what *rationality* requires; that is, the removal of "impediments or distortions in the reasoning process". Whether *liberalism* actually meets this requirement as Kymlicka asserts is not within the scope of our discussion to determine.

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⁸ Self-interested in the sense of being the outcome which the manipulator desires, if not necessarily the outcome most favourable to the manipulator.

⁹ And, of course, this need not even be based in an explicit effort to protect one's position; the subconscious desire to justify to oneself one's position or to think oneself a "fine fellow" may also contribute to emotivist self-justifications. This too is compatible with emotivism which, as MacIntyre notes, allows for the possibility that emotivist justifications of moral judgments might even be thought by the justifier to be based in rational, impersonal criteria (MacIntyre, 1981, p. 23).

¹⁰ There are even excellent examples of "rationalizing enquiry" in our modern day when those engaging in it have no such special incentive. In *A History of the Catholic Church*, Ludwig Hertling, a Jesuit priest, writes of Charlemagne's forced conversion of the Saxons:

. . . Charles the Great possessed a profound sense of responsibility. He aimed to be a Christian ruler and understood his position as demanding a stern sense of duty. That he proceeded violently in the extirpation of heathenism, as among the Saxons, is repugnant to modern sentiment. *But it cannot be denied that the Saxons embraced with special ardour the Catholic religion that was in the beginning forced upon them.*
(Hertling, 1957, p. 169, emphasis added)

Some might suggest that perhaps this was because all those with the strength to deny Catholicism had been killed or deported during the thirty-two years of Charlemagne's campaign. While the fatuousness of the kind of justification Hertling offers here for a forced religious "conversion" is fairly self-evident no matter in what "tradition of enquiry" one finds oneself, it no doubt would have greater power of influence in a society in which *all* rational enquiry was controlled by similar thinkers.

¹¹ "Slaves, obey your human masters in everything, not only when being watched, as currying favour, but in simplicity of heart, fearing the Lord" (Colossians 4:22).

¹² "Now therefore you are cursed, and some of you shall always be slaves, hewers of wood and drawers of water for the house of my God" (Joshua 9:23).

¹³ It might also be interestingly noted here that the word "propaganda" derives from the *Congregation de propaganda fide* (*The Congregation for Propagating the Faith*), a missionary committee established in 1622 by Pope Gregory XV. The pronouncements of those "conferred" with authority in a untraditional society can often be seen as aimed more at preservation of the reigning tradition than at "rational enquiry".

Notes

14 See *The Birth of Tragedy*, for example (Nietzsche, 1956 [1872]).

15 It should be noted that the mediaeval Christian societies which MacIntyre discusses in his works are not exempted from this list of tradition-driven communities based on the world view of the noble and powerful. This might at first seem paradoxical since Nietzsche rejects Christianity for its *weakness*: how can that religious tradition be on Nietzsche's weakness "list" and yet be one of those argued here to indicate MacIntyre's predilection for advocacy of the traditions of the *powerful*? But the Christianity to which Nietzsche refers is "weak" in his terms: its *philosophy* is one of turning the other cheek, waiting for a better afterlife, concern for the poor, and so on. On the other hand, the Christian *societies* MacIntyre refers to were "strong" in Nietzschean terms: they held the reins of power and their authorities constituted the social elite (*i. e.*, the powerful mediaeval Roman Catholic Church) of their societies. It is not therefore self-contradictory to include Christianity on the two different lists here because we are speaking of two different sorts of Christianity.

16 To repeat our earlier mantra; Athenian citizens, mediaeval Catholic priests, Communist Party members, and Iranian mullahs.

17 "Traditionless" in the sense of not being governed by a dominant, authoritative tradition (see Chapter XX of *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (MacIntyre, 1988, pp. 389 - 403).

18 An additional distinction between the positions of Nietzsche and MacIntyre ought to be noted here. MacIntyre's criticism of Nietzsche is that Nietzschean man chooses his own morality, whereas "MacIntyrean man" in modern times chooses between moralities established by traditions. There is therefore less of the superman in MacIntyrean man than in his Nietzschean counterpart because MacIntyrean man consents to an external standard while Nietzsche's superman applies his own, internal standard. Nonetheless, there is a distinctly Nietzschean character to MacIntyrean man: as will be seen, modern man in MacIntyre's view decides upon his own criteria what the truth should be rather than being led there by the truth itself.

19 In the liberal sense of being unique to the individual choosing.

Chapter Four: A Meaningful Moral Alternative?

We have to this point covered much ground in our analysis of communitarianism in general and Alasdair MacIntyre's communitarian vision in particular. Our starting point was an analysis of the liberal-communitarian debate in which both a number of liberal and communitarian positions, mutual criticisms and counter-criticisms were traced out. I noted that the implication of the work of recent liberals like John Rawls has been the location of the source of authoritative moral requirements in reason, and, through this, the suggestion of universally-applicable systems of justice and morality. Where reason cannot reach, liberals see individual choice as being the source of moral wisdom. Communitarians reject both these sources of morality, arguing instead for a conception of moral wisdom as finding its authority in shared community values. I argued that Alasdair MacIntyre's idea of a tradition was the most complete, most well-articulated vision of the communitarian ideal, and as such represented the best choice for an analysis aimed at determining the viability of communitarianism as an alternative morality for modernity.

But a certain tension was noted in MacIntyre's idea of traditions as the source of authoritative moral prescriptions for their local communities. MacIntyre, like all communitarians, argues that there is no universal truth, no ultimate source of moral wisdom in the world. Yet at the same time he argues for the legitimacy of the moral authority of the great traditions in their local contexts, and advocates our own construction of similarly tradition-driven local communities in our world of today. It is unclear what MacIntyre bases his attribution of authority and legitimacy to the great traditions upon if he does not see their moral truths as being derived from some source of actual truth. Various possible sources for such authority were examined and rejected. Not only do MacIntyre's traditions not find their authority in actual

truth, that authority is also not self-generating, self-justifying, or derived from the social matrix. I argued that *power* was the real source of authority for traditions in MacIntyre-type societies. The role for power as the source of authority in such societies could be seen at both the conceptual level (in MacIntyre's theory of traditions) and the empirical level (in actual traditional societies conforming to MacIntyre's model).

Having determined that power lies at the root of traditional authority in MacIntyre-type communities, the question arose as to whether MacIntyre could coherently advocate power-derived, tradition-based communities while staying true to other values to which he gives his philosophical allegiance. I argued that the power-based nature of the traditional societies MacIntyre lauds is incompatible with his advocacy of rationality, his repudiation of emotivism, and his rejection of Nietzscheanism.

We might now turn to the final question of this thesis. Is MacIntyre's communitarian vision a meaningful moral alternative for modernity? This question can only be answered in the negative. The anti-rational, emotivist, and Nietzschean qualities of MacIntyre's philosophy are objectionable for more than just their self-contradictoriness. Such qualities are in and of themselves negative and undesirable and MacIntyre is right in rejecting them. Our guideline in seeking truth *should* be rationality, which requires freedom of mind and thought, a logical standard by which truths are determined, and access by those so engaged to all available information in service of their enquiry. Emotivism *is* wrong, because it implies a definition of morality ("I approve of this, do so as well") that is discordant with what people understand morality to actually mean (a self-transcending, impersonal standard for behaviour) and because it encourages manipulative rather than mutually-respecting human relationships. And Nietzscheanism *is* evil, for equating truth with power; for worshipping the truths of the powerful and

“noble” rather than truths for all; for advocating choosing “truth” based on one’s own personal criteria rather than for truth itself; and for its two level conception of truth and consequent exaltation of “supermen” and abasement of the “masses”. Irrationality, emotivism, and Nietzscheanism are wrong and quite often wrong for the very reasons that MacIntyre rejects them.

MacIntyre’s response to these afflictions of our modern world is to advise us to reconceive truth as being particularistic and manifold and consequently to return to tradition-based modes of rational enquiry and social life. But MacIntyre’s solution cannot be the answer, incorporating as it does the very flaws he so eloquently criticizes elsewhere.

It may be the case that such flaws are an unavoidable corollary of a rejection of the existence of a universal truth in the first place, a rejection made generally by communitarians, and one made by MacIntyre almost at the outset of his search for a philosophical alternative to that which he perceives as underlying our modern world. To conceive of moral truths as being derived not from an actual, universal truth, but from some other source is to leave oneself open to the problem noted earlier in this work: from whence comes truth if not from truth itself? If a given tradition finds its authority elsewhere than in the expression of an existent truth, then its authority can only lie in an imaginary, a *man-made* truth. ‘X’ becomes true because we/they/I say X is true. To impose that truth upon everyone in a society is to make power, not rational deliberation, its determinant. A particularist conception of the truth has consequences. If we wish to avoid irrationality, emotivism, and Nietzscheanism, then perhaps we *cannot* conceive truth as being particularistic, as the communitarians do, but must rather redevote ourselves to the task of finding an actual, compelling universal moral truth. This is the true chore of those committed to a rational search for meaningful standards of justice and morality.

I have argued that Alasdair MacIntyre's communitarian vision does not represent a meaningful moral alternative for modernity. It is the case of course that we cannot definitively dismiss *all* communitarian claims that shared moral horizons will light our way out of the moral darkness of modernity based only upon the evaluation herein of MacIntyre's communitarianism. It may be the case that the communitarian dream of some other of the early communitarians like Taylor and Walzer, or of later communitarians like Etzioni can provide a theoretical structure more capable of generating a *truly* authoritative moral structure. But MacIntyre's vision is to this point the most fully realized and elaborated of our choices. If it cannot survive our scrutiny, then I suggest it is just as likely that these other conceptions of the communitarian ideal cannot themselves stand.

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